No. 204 • July, 1992 • $4.95 ($5.95 Can.)

AMAZING HEROES

Paul CHADWICK interview

COMING SOON
AT A COMIC SHOP NEAR YOU!

KREMLIN III

EDITORIAL

The End: Well, this is it. I'm sorry that *Amazing Heroes* has to go, and even sorrier that I had to be still at the helm when it sank, but I guess that's what I get for lasting longer than any other editor.

I'd like to fill this page with reminiscences and thank-yous, and believe me I have plenty of both. But there's already lots of that in this issue. I couldn't add anything more to them, other than that my only real regret about this job is that I may never again find one I like as much.

Instead, I guess I'll try to communicate what I've learned about comic books in my 2 1/2 years here.

Boy, comics suck.

Esssentially a dumber version of the cheap, stupid pulp magazines they eclipsed, comics books are even worse because you don't even have to go through the effort of reading them. It was the most moronic medium until television, but even TV has programs like *60 Minutes* to redeem it.

The so-called Golden Age of comic books is golden only in the memory of the people who experienced it. As far as most publishers were concerned, comics were ugly, disposable nonsense for children and people of low intelligence. For the most part, they were right.

The main invention of the period was the super-hero, an essentially fascist power fantasy aimed at male adolescents of all ages. They were largely responsible for giving the medium a reputation of violence and dumbheadedness that continues today.

In the '60s, mainstream comics bent over backwards to cater to the camp and pop art crazes, without ever knowing or caring what those things were about. Marvel comics boomed by addicting the most fanatic section of its readership with histrionic gimmicks and overwrought self-referential lingo. DC, meanwhile, worked everything into a pathetic formula of giant apes, purple robots, celebrity appearances, and anything else that would trigger knee-jerk sales when put on the cover.

Meanwhile, the so-called underground movement flourished on the racks of head shops and used record stores, with an "enlightened" audience that was mostly more concerned with their sex and drug content that their "art." Most of these people wound up dumping undergrounds when they grew up (i.e. graduated), while the publishers turned out to be even bigger crooks than the ones in the mainstream.

Then came the comic book store, which gave the comics subculture its very own ghetto. Largely designed to scare away all but the most fanatic comics reader, they rely increasingly on the lowest common denominator and pathetic cover gimmicks that make "collector's items" out of material that 99% of the population wouldn't read on a bet.

The alternative crowd, meanwhile, whines that a market designed and frequented by 12-year olds should support its esoteric "adult" books, which, at best, have a limited potential readership. As with the undergrounds, the average reader of these titles cares more about their sex content than their art or realism.

Comics are great.

They are one of the few indigenous American artforms, a marriage of narrative and art.

In the '40s, there was an explosion of readership as young people and GIs turned to comics for morale and escape at a time in which the whole world was at war. Comics grew through the discovery of the super-hero, a colorful, more benign variant of the pulp heroes that inspired it. The super-hero represented America at its most idealistic and optimistic period, expressing most people's confidence that good, when vigilant, could easily overcome corruption, deceit, and crime.

Comics at this stage were a young medium created by young people. The brilliant work of artists such as C.C. Beck, Jack Kirby, Jack Cole, Will Eisner, and Sheldon Mayer is full of skill and vitality.

In the '60s, Marvel Comics tapped into a new audience by creating a vital, exciting new line of comics that mixed adventure with new levels of character development. DC, meanwhile, took Superman, the first and most famous hero, into what many fans consider his best period, with a novel array of concepts and stories that continue to be influential today.

Then, the Underground comics gave readers a new outlook on politics and life. In an era when most of the "revolution" was merely escapism and hedonism, the undergrounds offered serious social criticism, not only of the establishment, but of the counterculture itself.

Then the comic book store arrived, guaranteeing a retail outlet that both readers and publishers could depend upon.

The comics specialty shop made possible the introduction of new kinds of comics. Young artists, small publishers, and new concepts could find an audience. Mainstream titles could be more serious and complex. Undergrounds, which grew into the alternatives, were more ambitious and varied than ever. Comics began to be collected into books, creating crossover hits like Frank Miller's *The Dark Knight Returns*, Art Spiegelman's *Maus*, and Larry Gonick's *Cartoon History of the Universe*.

A smart consumer, especially when aided by a good retailer, can get an incredible amount of high quality books if he or she tries. Comics are still a young, vital form with plenty of untapped potential, and this is a great time to be reading them.

So, which story do I truly believe? To tell the truth, I've adhered to both versions, often on the same day. That's because comics are mighty messed up these days, but their potential may be greater now than ever.

The solution, I believe, lies with the fans. The problem with the comics industry is not that it is dominated by super-hero fans, but that it loses them so quickly when they get tired of super-heroes.

By my estimates, most super-hero fans last about five years, after which they usually drop comics altogether. If these people instead decided to try reading other types of comics, the readership would become larger, smarter, and more diverse, without in any way diminishing the super-hero audience that made the direct market succeed in the first place.

So, if you can't work up the same enthusiasm fot *Infinity Wars* as you did for *Secret Wars*, don't worry. You're not becoming a snob, you just want a little variety. So try some other stuff, and if you can't find it, ask your retailer for it, and if your retailer can't or won't help you, then mail away for it. You might get to like comics again. And you know what? Contrary to everything you've read in *The Comics Journal*, you can be an alternatives fan and still read super-hero stuff!

That's all from *Amazing Heroes*.

—THOMAS HARRINGTON

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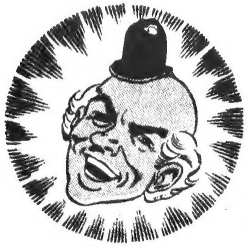

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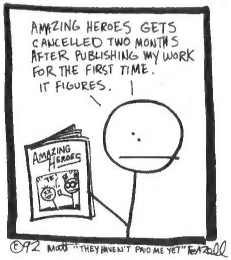
AMAZING HEROES GETS CANCELLED TWO MONTHS AFTER PUBLISHING MY WORK FOR THE FIRST TIME. IT FIGURES.
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©'92 MOOT "THEY HAVEN'T PAID ME YET" FAZZILL

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issue #204
STAFF
august, 1992

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Production Assistant: *Howard Rigberg*
Editorial Assistants: *Andrew Herington & Lisa X.*
Circulation: *Caryn Cresnsford*
Publisher: *Fantagraphics Books, Inc.*
Printed at: *Port Publications*

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Writing: Address all submissions to Thomas Harrington, Editor, *Amazing Heroes*, 7563 Lake City Way, Seattle, WA 98115. Enclose an S.A.S.E. Submissions must be typed, double-spaced. Keep a copy of your manuscript. *Always put your name, complete address, and phone number on the first page of each article.*

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Fantagraphics 69-72,74
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DISTRIBUTORS

ACTION DIRECT, 114 "A" Bldg., 1401 Fairfax Trafficway, Kansas City, KS 66115, U.S.A. (913) 281-5240; ANDROMEDA PUBLICATIONS LTD., 2113 Dundas Street West, Toronto, Ontario, M6R 1X1, Canada. (416) 593-9894; CAPITAL CITY DISTRIBUTORS, 2827 Perry Street, Madison, WI 53713, U.S.A. (608) 274-8987; DESTINY DISTRIBUTORS, INC., 13609 NE 126th Place, Suite 150, Kirkland, WA 98034, U.S.A. (206) 823-0171; DIAMOND DISTRIBUTORS, 1720 Belmont Ave. Bay C-2, Baltimore, MD 21207, U.S.A. (301) 298-1184; FANTAGRAPHICS BOOKS, INC., 7563 Lake City Way, Seattle, WA 98115, U.S.A. (206) 524-1967; MULTI-BOOK & PERIODICAL, 4136 S. Service Road, Burlington, Ontario, Canada, L7L 4X5 (416) 632-5573; NEPTUNE, 197 28th Street, Brooklyn, NY 11232 U.S.A. (718) 965-9165; SECOND GENESIS, 1112 NE 21st ST. Portland, OR 97232 U.S.A. (503) 281-1821; STYX INTERNATIONAL, 10-62 Scurfield Blvd, Winnipeg, Manitoba R3Y-IM5 Canada. (204) 489-0580; SUPERHERO ENTERPRISES, 70 Morris St., Morristown, NJ 07960, U.S.A. (201) 455-1211; TITAN DISTRIBUTORS, Ltd., P.O. Box 250, London E3 3LT, England. (01) 538-8300.

AMAZING HEROES #204 (ISSN 0745-6506), August, 1992. Published monthly by Fantagraphics Books, Inc. Editorial, business, and Offices of Publication: 7563 Lake City Way N.E., Seattle, WA 98115.

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Second-class postage paid at Port Washington, WI and additional mailing offices.

POSTMASTER: Please send Form 3579 to *AMAZING HEROES*, 7563 Lake City Way, Seattle, WA 98115.

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NEXT ISSUE:

Oh. Never mind.

NEWSLINE

COMICS GADFLY SIDNEY MELLON TO TAKE HELM OF *AMAZING HEROES*

Former *AH* columnist and *Thunderskull* creator Sidney Mellon has been appointed the new editor of *Amazing Heroes* beginning with *Amazing Heroes* #205.

Mellon, a longtime maverick of comics fandom, says he will bring a fresh perspective to the 11-year old fanzine. "I'll be a champion of the independent comics movement. I'll devote whole columns to the great, forgotten masterpieces of the 1980s. Like *Thunderskull*.

"I'm going to write about the great unsung Creators of our day. You wouldn't believe how many great writers are out there, creating comics that the blind publishing world won't let you see! I'm going to feature all their work. Maybe a whole issue for one of them in particular.

"I'm going to tell the whole world what a phoney Don Thompson is! Anyone who'd try to attack a rival publication by spreading rumors that one of the best-respected columnists in the graphic field is a hoax, well... you know! I'm even going to tell the world what he's really like! I'm even going to say that he's FAT!"

So far, Mr. Mellon's editorial duties have included cleaning out the Fantagraphics basement, moving boxes at the Fantagraphics warehouse, and cleaning out Kim Thompson's septic tank. "It builds character, like with Ralph Macchio in *The Karate Kid*," Thompson assured him.

Kim Thompson has yet to give a definite date for Mellon to actually edit the magazine, but says it will definitely be "in a while." Until then Sidney, sharing an uninsulated eave in the Fantagraphics attic with a rat he calls "Splinter," says that he is prepared to bring *Amazing Heroes* to heights from which it may never recover.

"I'll make sure Heidi MacDonald has a regular column. And I'll help her write it if she wants. I can take her out for Cokes and we can talk about all the fascinating subjects of graphic mythology deep into the night. Then we can go back to her place and I can help her organize her back issues." Ms. MacDonald had no comment.

All the regular features will change. Mellon will now be the sole critic in the review column, which will be retitled, "Comics Literature—A Creator's Viewpoint." Cartoonist Teri S. Wood has been instructed to do only cartoons that are about Batman, Wolverine, and Thunderskull, so long as they are "respectful." "Strom's Index" will be dropped since, as Mellon put it, "I suspected that, instead of using carefully researched statistics, Mr. Strom was secretly making some of those things up." Andy Mangels was fired when, after being instructed to do a three-part feature on the development of the *Thunderskull* feature film, told Mellon that no such film had ever been in development anywhere. "Obviously, this man knows nothing about movies," said Mellon.

Adam-Troy Castro will remain, although he can now only express and defend opinions that are formed by Mellon himself. "For someone whose native language is Cuban, Castro is already very good at expressing opinions: he only needs the right opinions to express." "Cover Gallery" will remain, but will be by Mellon, not Don Rosa. "I think this column would be less disrespectful to graphic illustratives if it was written by someone who has actually created comics for a living." "A Few Words" will continue unchanged, "featuring such underground, on-the-edge creators as Frank Miller and John Byrne."

The "Editorial" will expand to 17 pages, and there will be no more "Perspective" columns, since "to be good, a magazine does not need many opinions, merely one brilliant opinion."

Among Mr. Mellon's other plans: "I'll get the biggest pros to write columns and give interviews and draw Wolverine sketches for the pages of *AH*. I'm sure Frank Miller, Rob Liefeld, and Jim Lee are just dying to give their fascinating opinions on Art and Life, if only they were asked by someone who really understands the mythic greatness of what they're doing. Someone they can trust. Someone who would never say anything bad about them.

"But first of all, I'll fire Gary Groth." ●

Art from the Sidney Mellon-written *Thunderskull*.

LATE-BREAKING NEWS:

Todd Loren, who founded Revolutionary Comics, was found stabbed to death in his apartment on June 18th. The controversial publisher, who published *Rock 'n' Roll Comics*, *Stickboy*, and *Contemporary Bio-Graphics*, among others, was 32 years old.

After Loren failed to come in to work on the 18th, his father Herb Shapiro, who works at Revolutionary, drove to his son's condo. Finding it locked, he had a locksmith open it, and discovered the body. A police investigation is underway, but there are as yet no news.

Revolutionary has vowed that "Loren's work will continue, and his company will improve and grow according to his wishes" under the leadership of Herb Shapiro.

In other late-breaking news, *Incredible Hulk* artist Dale Keown is leaving Marvel for Image Comics. He will officially announce his decision at the upcoming Chicago Con.

Keown is only the latest of a series of hot artists who have abandoned Marvel for upstart Image Comics. Little information was available on Keown's new title, *Pitt*. The artist said the title character was difficult to describe. "You'll understand when you see him," said Keown. Pitt will have an 8-page preview in *Youngblood* #4 before appearing in his own comic. It has not been decided whether it will be a 4-issue mini-series or a regular monthly title.

"It was just time to move on," said the artist. He did not discount working for Marvel again. "I'd like to leave that open. I didn't burn any bridges."

THE NOW-IRRELEVANT RESULTS OF THE *AMAZING HEROES* READERS' POLL

Whew! I guess bribery worked. Spurred on by a promise of a free issue, readers answered this missive in droves.

What is Your Favorite Column?: The surprise winner is...The Reviews! It was followed by "Infernal Gall," "Backstage," "Newsline," with "Cover Gallery" and "Amazing Readers" tying for fifth.

If the answers were numbered in order of preference, I counted only the top five, giving five votes to the favorite, four to the second favorite, etc. If items were checked instead of numbered, I gave each item three points each unless more than five items were checked, in which case I gave them one point each.

The two lowest rated columns were "Coming Distractions" and "A Few Words". AFW, however, might have been handicapped by its relative newness and by anonymity. One reader did not list it among his favorite columns, but included three AFW interviews in the list of his four favorite features.

Is there a recent feature you really liked? The overwhelming winner was *Amazing Heroes* #200, the all-comics issue. Of course, it was also the issue the poll appeared in. The only other item to get a large number of votes was the Hulk issue (*AH* #198).

Is there a particular story you'd like to see? No overwhelming favorites, but multiple votes for articles on toys, small press books, Shade, the Changing Man, Michael Golden, Steve Rude, and the return of the Preview Special.

Have you ever Danced With the Devil by the Pale Moonlight? I was surprised. Virtually everyone answered, and except for a few no's, virtually every answer was different. Here are just a few. "Bwah ha ha. Yes, and I plan to do so again and again." "No, but I've boogied with a bimbo in a bar with a strobelight." "No, but I've watusied with Wendigo in a Winter Wonderland." "You have me confused with Andy Mangels—must be the beard." "Yes! Like everybody else." "Not yet, but Soon." "No, but I dated her once." "No, because I hear the devil is a lousy dancer." "I plan to soon." "June 23, 1989." "Occasionally." "Yes, but only after consulting several licensed therapists." "Yeah, and she had a blue dress, a blue dress, devil with a blue dress on. (Lord have Mercy)."

What's the *Worst* Thing About Amazing Heroes? "Reviews", the price, the Silly Covers, The Wood/Strom debate, low production quality (black & white, cheap paper, etc.), its impending cancellation, "Coming Distractions."

Are there other fanzines you like? In descending order: *The Comics Journal* ("in-depth and critical reviews"); *Comic Buyer's Guide* ("timely news"); nothing ("I picked up *AH* #191 and never looked back."); *Comics Scene* ("diverse articles, most of it in color"), *Comics Interview* ("many samples of art by their interview subjects"), and *Wizard* ("it's in color").

Any other Comments? "I would like to see *Amazing Heroes* switch to a recycled paper, regardless of the increase." "Keep up the great work." "Covers are usually worth the price of admission." "Hope the hiatus is a short one." "It's very hard to find *AH*...I'd subcribe, but you burned me on *Nemo*, so no thank you." "Biweekly? Pleez?" "Does anyone besides Teri and Dave think their mock feud is cute, funny, or entertaining?" "Use as many *interesting* reviews as possible." "Too many DC/Marvel cover features in the last year." "Please show more artwork." "I've been here from the start and I really like what you're doing." "Impossible to find your magazine in Northern Minnesota." "Don't cancel this mag!!" "It's sad to hear about *AH*'s impending 'hiatus.' *AH* filled a niche in our crazy comic world by being intelligently written and covering diverse topics." "You can learn one thing from the your competition... marketing." "Can you get Harvey Pekar to do something for you on a regular basis?" "The reviews suck." "I would prefer one strong reviewer (like R.A. Jones) to several." "Get Adam-Troy Castro to stop making derogatory comments about rap music." "I'm really saddened that *Amazing Heroes* will be on hiatus for the summer."

If you're wondering why we ran a poll just as the magazine was cancelled, well...We had been preparing the poll for some time, and found out about the cancellation two days before we were to ship *AH* #200 to the printers. Rather than scrap all that work just to replace it with something else, we decided to see what people had to say.

Thanks to all who replied. It's been grand.

—THOMAS HARRINGTON

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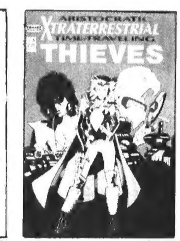
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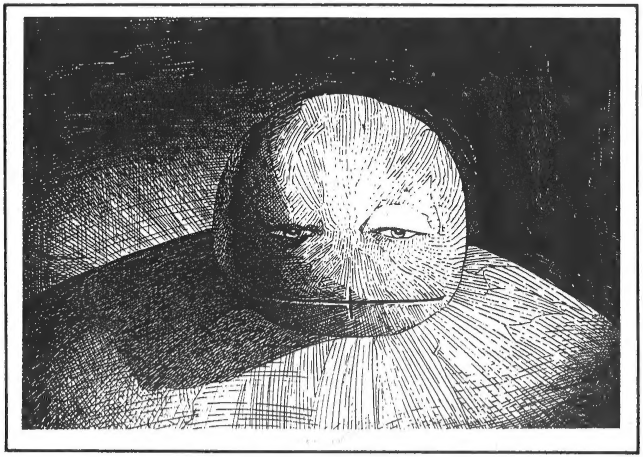


THE PAUL CHADWICK INTERVIEW

BY KEN FRIES

Paul Chadwick, with a background in illustration and movie storyboarding, entered the comics field in 1984 drawing for Pacific (Salimba) and Marvel (Dazzler). In 1986 his character Concrete began appearing in Dark Horse Presents, *and the next year in his own magazine. Ten issues of the original run of* Concrete *appeared, to be followed by one-shots, reprints, a portfolio and (most recently) a four-issue miniseries,* Concrete: Fragile Creature, *which drew heavily on Chadwick's experience in the movie buisiness.*

Here Chadwick discusses the preparations underway for a Concrete *movie, as well as his plans for the future. This interview was conducted at a New York convention in January, 1992, and revised by Chadwick in April, 1992.*

AMAZING HEROES: *With* Concrete: Fragile Creature *#4 now out, what does the immediate future hold*

Pre-production sketches for the *Concrete* film. Note the origin sequence (lower right).

for Concrete?

PAUL CHADWICK: My plan is to do a couple of self-contained issues, each with a lead Concrete story along with some non-Concrete backups that are a bit experimental in art style and content. I'm counting on my readers being forgiving enough to allow me that sort of thing.

AH: *Something like* A Sky of Heads?

CHADWICK: Yes, I will in fact be doing at least one new *Sky* story, but some other offbeat things as well.

After those, I'll be doing another miniseries. This one's about monkeywrenching, also called ecotage—sabotaging equipment and otherwise disrupting wilderness destruction or development. It's a controversial tactic, called terrorism by some, though that seems hyperbole to me. The ethics of monkeywrenching, as laid out by Earth First! founder Dave Foreman, strictly precludes the taking of life. Property destruction in the service of protecting life is the idea.

Part of the controversy stems from an incident which seemed to fly in the face of that ethic. A couple of years ago in California a spiked tree got through to the mill (the idea of spiking trees is to inform the loggers they're spiked, and therefore unmillable, so preventing their being cut down) causing a blade to disintegrate. A fragment cut into a millworker's neck, nearly killing him. It is, unfortunately, the most publicized aspect of the monkeywrenching movement—which Foreman has declared the work of someone unconnected with Earth First!—which I see mainly as a positive development. I guess you can tell I'm already into my research for this one.

AH: *Would there ever be any comic book work outside of* Concrete *in your future?*

CHADWICK: Eventually, yes. In the same way I developed *Concrete* for several years before publication, I'm working on something quite different. It indulges the moody, poetic side of myself which *Concrete* doesn't lend itself to. More than this I prefer not to say, since it's in the notebook stage and still developing. But don't hold your breath. I figure it took about four years from deciding I wanted to do *Concrete* to getting it into print, and this will probably have a similar incubation time.

In the meantime, I'm going to carry on full speed with *Concrete*. I came to the realization that even though it started in a whimsical way in my mid-20s, Concrete is going to be my life's work. A part of me resists that. I'm going to be tied to the things I was passionate about at that age, *forever*? A chilling thought. But on the other hand there's great value in devoting years to a single character, wringing everything you can from yourself for it, giving him a life outside of a single story. I see the dedication Dave Sim brings to his work—I guess nobody will ever match it, but that seems like the right track, rather than flitting from one thing to another. If you're fortunate enough to have a character you can put in a great variety of stories, I say stick with it.

AH: *Basically, Sim has had just four stories so far—but they're too convoluted! And as you go along, each part of the story introduces a new potential story, with small bits involved in the whole giant scheme.*

CHADWICK: It's astounding anybody could willingly lay out such an ambitious task for themselves. Him and Jack Katz [*Cartoonist of* The First Kingdom—*TH*].

AH: *You said earlier that* Within Our Reach *(a 1991 Christmas anthology comic published by Star*Reach and distributed by Marvel) contained the most widely distributed Concrete story.*

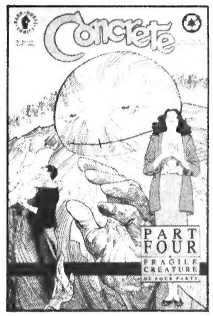
CHADWICK: I thought that rather ironic. It sold better than any publication with Concrete in it so far. It was nice to see the book be such a sucess, though; it supported two worthy causes (AIDS research and forest preservation) and did Mike Friedrich credit. He knocked himself out to get all his clients to produce, working gratis, an excellent group of stories.

AH: *To get that many people to agree to it...*

CHADWICK: I'm sure it took a lot of nudging! I needed a lot of urging to get my story in on time, I know.

AH: *Wasn't there supposed to be a new Concrete lithograph coming?*

CHADWICK: Yes, we announced that, didn't we? Too bad I haven't done the painting yet! I'm thinking of putting a couple of more weeks of painting time in on the centerspread art of *Fragile Creature* #4—the smoky scene filled with Stanislaw Szukalski sculptures—and using that for the print. The reproduction on the [illegible] paper did it no favors, and two weeks of refinement—not necessarily tightening, but reconsideration—might make it worthy of a quality reproduction.



AH: *Any original posters, not just stuff from the book? Actually, the covers would be nice...*

CHADWICK: Nothing planned right now. Though Mike Richardson occasionally calls me up and takes advantage of my suggestible nature and gets me to agree to some new scheme. Not that I'm so great at follow-through, I am still intermittently working on the Big Little book version of the transatlantic swim story from *Concrete* #2.

AH: *Would you ever let any other creators do* Concrete?

CHADWICK: I'll probably always be protective about writing it, but I'd love to collaborate with some of the great artists in this field. Unfortunately, *Concrete* hasn't sold enough to justify paying top art rates so far; I'm hoping the movie will help us there. But right here at the convention Mike Mignola expressed interest in collaborating—can you imagine that? Given we coud pay adequately, I'd love working with him or Charles Vess or Scott Hampton or a lot of people.

Unpublished art: Concrete and his dog, Tripod.

AH: *Now that the Concrete movie has been announced, is it official?*
CHADWICK: Oh. . . [*laughs*]
AH: *I didn't think so.*
CHADWICK: Do these thing ever become official? The contracts are written. I've read them, and they're in the lawyers's hands, being picked over for mistakes or whatever. The process has progressed enough that I'm confident that at least a script will be commissioned, the rights optioned. Interestingly, one of the requirements for renewing the option is that special-effects tests be made of Concrete, how the illusion of a stone man will be achieved.

I'm optimistic. I spent a week in December working out the story with Larry Wilson, the director/co-writer, which we then pitched to Largo's VP Lloyd Levin. His reaction was, I'm told, unusually good as these things go. He had some suggestions, of course, but they were quite workable and really rather astute. We've since incorporated them into the script, which is in the process of being written. (As I say, we're confident that much will happen).

AH: *Are any of them familiar with the character?*
CHADWICK: Very familiar. You'd be surprised how aware of the comics field some movie people are. They're interested in doing a film quite faithful to the spirit of the comic. The story is being drawn pretty directly from the comic, with a few necessary adjustments.

One is that Ron and Maureen meet in the flesh before his transformation. This sets up the characters, and adds some irony later on as they find they can have a relationship when he's a rock-coated giant that eluded them when he was normal. We get his origin, his introduction to the public as a cyborg, with the attendent merchandising and celebrity madness. Even the initial story, the one set at a child's birthday party, fits in there. The main difference from the comic is a thriller-type ending. It provides some suspense and closure not present in the comics version. You need that in a film—at least in a Hollywood film that seeks to fulfill the expectations of a mass audience—whereas I could get away in an ongoing comics series with more loose ends, more leisurely goofiness.
AH: *How closely will you be working on the movie?*
CHADWICK: I'm co-writing the script. Beyond that, I hope to storyboard it and contribute conceptual art. Time will tell, here, but collaborating with Larry has gone smoothly so far. This is a dream come true for me. I guess I should be more cautious, put in a caveat here. There are, after all, a lot of movies that get written but are never filmed.
AH: *And movies that get filmed but not distributed. Look at* Captain America.
CHADWICK: Indeed. Still, I'm hopeful. A lot of it depends on the momentum created by people attaching themselves to it, and on that count we're in good shape. We already have a director, Lary Wilson, flush from the sucess of *The Addams Family* which he cowrote with Carolyn Thompson. The pair also wrote Tim Burton's next movie. *Mai, the Psychic Girl* [*based on the Japanese comic—TH*] and the late Anton Furst's project tailored for Michael Jackson, *Midknight*. And Tim Burton has verbally agreed to come on as Executive Producer, which opens doors for us and provides some impeccable expertise in this genre. And I'm told Largo is quite serious about the project, both on its merits and for the sake of its relationship with Dark Horse. I've been around the movie business enough to get a sense when things are going to dissolve into smoke, and that doesn't seem to be the case here.

I count myself lucky that this group of people have come to it. I remember being approached by somebody who thought Sylvester Stallone might play Concrete. They just didn't get it. I guess!
AH: *Who would you want?*
CHADWICK: In the latest Author's Forum I invited casting suggestions, and I guess I'd rather not put out who I have in my mind lest somebody be dissuaded from voicing a great idea. They've already met with Bill Murray, who expressed interest on the basis of the comics (the script isn't done yet). But it's still up in the air, of course.
AH: *Since we're on movies, what did you think of* The Rocketeer*?*
CHADWICK: I enjoyed it enormously. It may have lacked some of the juice of the comic by nicing up the characters—I missed Cliff's hotheadedness, and Peevy was more fatherly than irascible—but on the whole it was a loving and faithful adaptation. I understand Disney's reasons for changing Betty to Jenny; there is, after all, a real-life Betty Page out there. . . .
AH: *And she wants to be left alone; I guess it was in deference to her, too.*
CHADWICK: Astonishing to learn some of the struggles they had. At one point the executives called for an open faced NASA-type helmet. I guess it reflected the conventional wisdom that you don't cover your hero's face. But how anyone could turn their back on Dave's stunning helmet design is beyond me. You really have to wonder how even halfway decent movies get made, let alone great ones.
AH: *I could see the people who did* [Rocketeer] *taking Concrete and generally leaving it alone along the way. I guess you have the same feel-*

More origin storyboards.

Chadwick continues to express his ecological concerns in his comics.

ing about the people you're working with.

CHADWICK: In fact, Largo coproduced *The Rocketeer* with Disney. And I understand Lloyd Levin fought mightily with the Disney brass to retain the strong elements in the comic. So I would tend to agree.

The process of making a film always presents obstacles to artistic decisions, though. I wrote about this in an Author's Forum. You start out—and this is where we are with the Concrete movie, just the greatest time there will be—with the ideas flowing freely, potentials huge. But in every film I've ever worked on, there's been a certain amount of heartbreak. For one reason or another, great ideas get pared down or jettisoned along the way. It may be as simple as an actor being unable to convincingly deliver a line, or a lost location, or bad weather, thousands of things come up that force compromise. I guess I'm preparing myself emotionally for that. All those "if only. . ." moments.

AH: *Would you ever consider an animated* Concrete?

CHADWICK: Sure. What I'd try to do is have them adapt my short stories, I think, rather than create new ones. While there'd probably be distortions and bows to convention along the way, starting from that point would insure something of the original peeking through.

I'm reminded of a story Mark Evanier told at a CAPS (a L.A.-based cartoonist's society) meeting years ago. They decide to do a *Happy Days* animated series—based on the sitcom. The first thing they did was give the characters a time machine and a talking dog! Why bother adapting something if you're going to graft on these wild irrelevant elements? Madness.

That was years ago, however, and in fact animation is now in a new golden era, creatively. There's a lot of brilliant, hip animation being produced—*The Simpsons* being the standout, I guess, but also *Ren and Stimpy* and the rest. There's a lot more latitude than was there was in the Saturday morning swamp of a while back, which lingers in our mental landscape. Pee Wee Herman had a lot to do with it, probably—showing there was an audience for manic innovation and a more modern sensibility. Postmodern?

Anyway, animation would be fine by me, but the film is going to have to come out before anything happens on that front. There was talk at the Fox network of a series, but that was before the film project came together.

AH: *Do they have a budget yet?*

CHADWICK: There's been a target mentioned, but we're not that far along yet, really. So rather than give you a meaningless figure, I'll just say no.

AH: *On the* Dark Horse Presents *fifth anniversary special. What did you think of Frank Miller's rendition of Concrete?*

CHADWICK: [*laughs*] Well, he certainly trimmed him down, didn't he! It really tickled me to have Frank even drawing Concrete, and it was a great, hilarious cover. He certainly did a better Concrete than I would do a Ronin.

AH: *Well, that's what I was going to ask! Turnabout being fair play, would your draw, say, Elektra?*

CHADWICK: [*laughs*] Well, you'd have to clear that with Marvel, first.

AH: *All right, do Martha Washington, or Nixon, or. . .*

CHADWICK: Or Marv!

AH: *Yeah! Oh, Marv would be nice.*

CHADWICK: I'm just nuts about that strip ["Sin City"]. That's black-and-white comics as no one has ever done them. He's really pushing himself and the format as far as it can go. It's the perfect kind of story for that too. The desperate search through an expressionistic environment, the tough-guy poetry narration, that. . . face. Just a silhouette with five hundred bandages on it. I love every page of that strip.

AH: *In* Dark Horse Presents *#58, he's been captured by this cannibal. It's definitely taking a whole new turn.*

CHADWICK: Is that right? That Frank. [*looking at interview notes*] What is that "less than six hundred pages" note?

AH: *Oh, I was checking all your stuff, and I realized that for six years of published work, and close to ten years of actual concept and everything, there are only about six hundred pages of Concrete existing.*

CHADWICK: You're shaming me.

AH: *No, not shaming. If anything, it's a compliment. For a movie to be developed from a character that had this essentially few pages of work. . . .*

CHADWICK: Before my head gets too big, we must remember *The Rocketeer.* [*both laugh*]

AH: *Okay, how many pages are there? A hundred?*

CHADWICK: Something like that. It is certainly and example of quality over quantity. That's the curse of doing a solo strip, that meager output. Dave Sim to the contrary, I guess, although Gerhard surely contributes a great deal to that strip.

AH: *For the first 75 or 80 it was strictly Sim.*

CHADWICK: I would love to be producing two hundred pages a year, but I'm beginning to realize it just isn't in me. It's hard to manage yourself, keep up a head of steam. It's not like you can sit down and say, "Well, I'm going to do two pages a day." That's not so wild a pace, and it would quickly add up to between five and six hundred pages a *year.* My problem, however, is writing; I'm dreafully slow, I eat up time with research, false starts, and not a little procrastination. There are also plenty of production tasks on the back end—typesetting and stats and coloring. I'm pretty closely involved with the coloring, though my wife does most of it. I art direct. I am, when it comes down to it, quite concerned with control when it comes to *Concrete,* perhaps in a way that is sometimes self-defeating. Just adding those endpapers to *Fragile Creature* probably cost me a month, all told.

AH: *I think those extra pages are appreciated, though. What exactly does Jed Hotchkiss do?*

CHADWICK: Some inking, some

Concrete and a starry sky—a favorite Chadwick combination.

Mike Mignola has expressed interest in collaborating with Chadwick.

pencilling, a little here and there. But I tend to keep the reins very tight, and do the lion's share of both art tasks on any one page. "Art Assistance" covers it. I think Jed may be frustrated sometimes, I'm just so possessive about the work. On *Concrete* I must be a maddening collaborator.

AH: *When did you first become environmentally conscious, or aware, or active?*

CHADWICK: It's a growing thing. My wife's been an influence on that count; she's always taking in orphaned wild animals and raising them. She's a pretty good tracker, too. Winter's the best time, clear prints that allow you to identify the species. We sometimes follow the trails and try to reconstruct the behavior.

I lived on the West coast for most of my life, and there seems to be more environmental awareness out there, just because it's undergone the transformation from wilderness to sprawling development more recently. I remember the solar collectors going up on the roof of my apartment in L.A. when Jerry Brown created the tax credits for them. I spent hundreds of hours reading the *Whole Earth Catalog*, which is basically a sourcebook for building a environmentally sane civilization. Paul Ehrlich's books were a big influence.

I didn't express anything overtly political until *Concrete Celebrates Earth Day*, I guess because I suffered from the environmental somnolence of the Reagan years like so many others. I am also temperamentaly averse to contentiousnes. The medical waste on the Jersey shore, the Ozone hole, the Exxon Valdez were all wakeup calls, with Earth Day being the loudest of all. Mike Richardson saw it coming, and knowing my inclinations he suggested I join the chorus.

I think more and more people are realizing that the processes that supports the civilization we've built up can't be sustained forever, and we've got to do something about it now. Unfortunately, we tend to rise to tasks only in crisis, so it's necessary to create a sense of crisis while there are still effective actions we can take.

Sometimes all the talk seems pointless. As I research this monkey-wrenching series I'm seeing a change in myself. Maybe when I'm done with it you'll read of me being arrested for pouring jeweler's rouge into bulldozer gas tanks—though given my ivory-tower nature, I doubt it. But I'm getting a growing sense of desperation. It could be the human race has seen its best days come and go.

AH: *Is there any one thing you're particularly proud of, and would really like a lot more people to be introduced to—aside from* Concrete *in general?*

CHADWICK: I don't think I have some great unsung achievement to my credit. I'll tell you, though—there's a part of me, perhaps the little kid egoist, that would like more recognition as an artist, as opposed to my writing. I was counted quite a draughtsman among my illustrator friends, and it was a comedown when I entered the comics field. There are just so many excellent artists, it was discouraging to find that among this crowd I was just a little above average. I keep telling myself I'm going to improve my art, spend more time on that aspect of it; but I think you reach a level which you pretty much stay at, accepting that, doing your best within that natural limit.

AH: *Storytelling in the form of artwork is probably more important than linework itself.*

CHADWICK: True enough. Still, I'd like to be able to do knockout, pretty pictures. That was a lot of what brought me to comics, the most memorable thing from my childhood, certainly. I recall the drama and wonder of Kirby's Silver Surfer gliding into the microverse, or Steranko's Captain America confronting Hydra hoardes in the New York sewers. When I reread those comics, I'm struck by what harebrained stories the breathtaking art illustrated; yet it didn't matter. At least not then. I do think beautiful art can have an enduring impact even if the story it's serving is a weak read.

Look at *Hard Boiled*: Frank and Geoff won the best writer-artist Eisner despite a scant hint of a plot (which is baffling until the last issue) and cryptic, minimalist dialogue—not to mention basically repellent subject matter. But the art was so richly imagined and beautifully crafted the voter felt compelled to recognize their achievement. That's art carrying the day.

(I hasten to add that Frank concurrently exhibited his skill at hugely inventive and intricate writing in *Give Me Liberty.*)

Unpublished art of a favorite Concrete theme: testing his artificial body's limits.

Does this mean I'm going to skimp on writing in *Concrete* to draw pretty but simplistic stories? Unlikely. I have pretty set creative habits by now which aren't going to change. But I do feel dissatisfaction with my artwork, which contributed to my descision to take a hiatus a couple of years back.

AH: *You left comics to do SF book covers.*

CHADWICK: That was the plan. Just be an artist for a year. But I had some eye-opening experiences. For one thing, despite doing a fair amont of SF work in the early '80s, I found a lot of doors closed to me. It made me appreciate the acceptance I have in the comics field. I just didn't get that many commissions, and rather than sticking to my resolve I found myself doing comics work (though at a modest scale). The *Concrete* reprints started coming out, and I felt compelled to polish the stories by adding new pages, new covers. I did that Superman story for [*Christmas with the Super-Heroes* #2]. A short story or two for *Dark Horse Presents*.

I also wasn't knocked out by the paintings I produced that year. I'd figured that just by thinking a lot about painting, and honing my drawing skills by doing comics, I would have improved substantially as a painter. Well, it wasn't as much as I'd hoped. It was an instructive year that made me recognize my strengths and weaknesses, and appreciate what I had in *Concrete* and the comics field.

I'm not ruling out a repeat, actually. But if I get bitten by the painting bug again I think I'll find a way to do it in the comics field—cover paintings, painted comics, whatever. Actually, recently I did a painting for the *Arzach* portfolio [Tundra's] putting together. But for now I think I'm spending my time on what I can do the most with, what I'm best at.

AH: *Which is* Concrete.

CHADWICK: That about sums it up. ●

A Villain History of Mr. MXYZTPLK a.k.a. Mr. MXYZPTLK

The GUIZER of ZrFFF

by RICH MORRISSEY

To most modern fans, the term "comic book" is something of a misnomer for a medium that, for the most part, is relatively lacking in humor. Indeed, such originally seemed to be the case with Superman. But earlier collaborations of his creators, writer Jerry Siegel and artist Joe Shuster, had featured a blend of humor and adventure.

After they had sold Superman to DC all of Joe Shuster's time, and a good portion of Jerry Siegel's, was devoted to Superman stories. If they were ever to capture the blend of humor and adventure they had been striving for in their earlier work, it was clear it would have to be in that feature.

"The Mysterious Mr. Mxyztplk" was tucked away in back of *Superman* #30 (September-October, 1944) with no mention on the cover, and it took the readers as much by surprise as its waggish villain did the city of Metropolis and its hero. A cartoonishly drawn little man wearing an outlandishly designed tuxedo and a small derby hat, and possessing abilities unimaginable even by Superman's standards, romped through the early pages of the story. He made an ambulance blow up, engaged in dialogue with a statue that he brought to life, and caused the water in a swimming pool to disappear. Not until he happened to appear at a mayoral press conference covered by Clark Kent did Superman make an appearance, on page 7 of his own 12-page story.

The little man identified himself as Mr. Mxyztplk, and set a hilarious but ever-escalating and increasingly dangerous sequence of pranks going, with Superman trailing behind in increasing frustration. Eventually Superman learned that Mxyztplk was from another dimension, and had learned the magic words to transfer him to and from Earth's own universe. Continuing the conversation, Superman finally tricked the alien practical joker into revealing the word, Klptzyxm, which "if spoken aloud would return me to my world for a time."

Despite DC's frequent reluctance to reprint its older stories, this tale has been reprinted no less than four times, most recently in *The Greatest Superman Stories Ever Told*. Yet, like the extradimensional character, there are many aspects of the story that fans and even professionals have found difficult to put their fingers on.

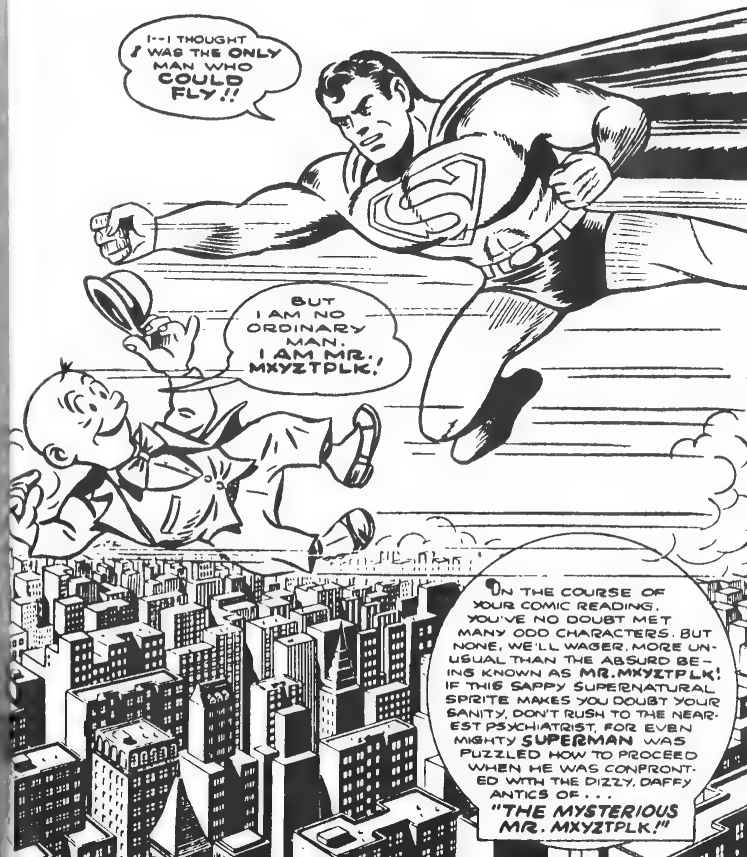
Like all Superman stories of the time, it was credited to Siegel and Shuster, but by 1944 were no longer personally responsible for even a majority of the stories. Jerry Siegel joined the armed forces for the duration of World War II (as did editor Mort Weisinger). Joe Shuster was 4-F due to defective vision, but he couldn't draw all or even most of the Superman stories by then, and several ghost artists were handling most of the Superman art for him. However, Siegel continued to send in scripts written during his limited spare time, and Shuster supervised the shop that drew the stories.

He clearly had a hand on the design of Mr. Mxyztplk. With his small body, huge head and eyes, and missing chin, Mxyztplk was physically based on Smiley, one of a pair of comedic characters Siegel and Shuster created for an early attempt at a newspaper strip in 1935.

Jerry Siegel did indeed write "The Mysterious Mr. Mxyztplk," and is so credited in *The Greatest Superman Stories Ever Told*. That book credits the art to John Sikela, a regular ghost on Superman stories in the middle 1940's, but Sikela clearly had nothing to do with it. Mxyztplk's first story, and most of those featuring the character that appeared in the comic books for the next few years, was drawn by an artist whom Jerry Siegel has identified as Ira Yarbrough. A former ghost on the *Buck Rogers* newspaper strip, Yarbrough worked on Superman stories from 1943 to 1948, and his somewhat more cartoonish style was at its best on lighthearted stories like this one.

Also, this story's status as the *real* first appearance of Mr. Mxyztplk has been called into question. The character had actually shown up several months before in a sequence of the *Superman* newspaper strip written by DC's Editor-in-Chief of the time, F. Whitney Ellsworth, and drawn by one of Shuster's most talented ghosts, Wayne Boring. Running between February and June of 1944, the sequence introduced a Mr. Mxyztplk who looked a bit more out of place in Boring's world than in Yarbrough's.

But he was only one of two unlikely new characters. The other, a young woman known only as "Miss Dreamface," was so beautiful that any man who saw her, including Mxyztplk and Superman himself, fell instantly in love with her. The jealous Mxyztplk tampered with the brakes of her car, leading to an accident that permanently disfigured her face—after which


I--I THOUGHT I WAS THE ONLY MAN WHO COULD FLY!!
BUT I AM NO ORDINARY MAN. I AM MR. MXYZTPLK!
ON THE COURSE OF YOUR COMIC READING, YOU'VE NO DOUBT MET MANY ODD CHARACTERS. BUT NONE, WE'LL WAGER, MORE UNUSUAL THAN THE ABSURD BEING KNOWN AS MR. MXYZTPLK! IF THIS SAPPY SUPERNATURAL SPRITE MAKES YOU DOUBT YOUR SANITY, DON'T RUSH TO THE NEAREST PSYCHIATRIST, FOR EVEN MIGHTY SUPERMAN WAS PUZZLED HOW TO PROCEED WHEN HE WAS CONFRONTED WITH THE DIZZY, DAFFY ANTICS OF . . . "THE MYSTERIOUS MR. MXYZTPLK!"

HA! HA! HA! THAT IS FUNNY! WITH YOUR MEAGER THREE-DIMENSIONAL INTELLIGENCE YOU THOUGHT THAT YOU COULD TRICK ME . . .
HA! HA! - WELL, HA, HA - YOU'LL HAVE TO GIVE ME CREDIT FOR TRYING, EH, MXYZTPLK ? HA! HA! HA!
. . . INTO . . . HA! HA! . . . SAYING THE MAGIC WORD, "KLPTZYXM"! HA! HA!
GOOD GRIEF! WHAT AM I LAUGHING AT ?? I - I JUST SAID IT - I JUST SAID THE MAGIC WORD!!
NO FAIR! YOU TRICKED ME! IT'S UNETHICAL! IT AIN'T FUNNY! ITTTZZZ . . .
HA! HA! SO LONG, FELLA! NEXT TIME DON'T BE TOO CONTEMPTUOUS OF A MERE 2-DIMENSIONAL BEING!

Mr. Mxyztplk's first appearance—and *dis*appearance—was in *Superman* #30.

all her suitors vanished except Ted Spence, her childhood sweetheart. The story's farcical nature had unexpectedly turned serious, and Mr. Mxyztplk, himself shocked by this unexpected turn of events, no longer had any place in it. He disappeared the moment Spence gave him a well-deserved punch in the face, and Superman commented that this extra-dimensional being had been literally knocked out of our own dimension.

Both the *Superman* comic book and newspaper strip stories seem to be the first meeting of Superman and Mr. Mxyztplk, but Jerry Siegel has stated that the first comic book story had been sent to DC in June of '43 before the strip. By Siegel's own admission Mxyztplk had been aimed especially at the newspaper-strip audience, and he seems to have been as successful there as he was in the comic books, if not more so.

The Guizer

Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster had long been fond of practical jokes. In 1939, before it was clear that *Superman* had taken off, they had even set up "The Siegel-Shuster School of Humor," a correspondence course which was advertised in *Spicy Detective Stories* (a risque magazine that also belonged to DC publisher Harry Donenfeld's empire). After the success of Superman, they came up with the idea of introducing his younger self as Superboy, "before he developed a social conscience" and used his powers to play practical jokes. The idea was not well received by Donenfeld, who was determined to keep his flagship characters exemplary role models. Undaunted, Siegel applied his interest to villains like the Prankster and Mxyztplk.

Mr. Mxyztplk was a being who had powers dwarfing Superman's body and Luthor's mind, and he used them neither for good or evil but simply for mischief. This may well explain the enduring popularity of the character, who stands alongside Luthor as one of the two villains to maintain a regular presence through most of Superman's career.

As an extradimensional being, Mr. Mxyztplk wasn't really a man in the usual sense. He was called a "sprite" occasionally in his initial story, but was most commonly referred to as an "imp"—a term whose definitions range from a mischievous child to a demon from Hell, both of which have aspects he incorporated. But he is also a Trickster, an icon as old in folklore as the Hero or the Villain; he has much in common with both and can be either. In the Superman stories he functioned largely as Villain, but would occasionally come to Superman's aid against a truly evil villain like The Kryptonite Kid.

In his book *The Guizer*, folklore expert Alan Garner says of this archetype: "Psychology calls him Trickster. I have called him Guizer. Guizer is the proper word for an actor in a mumming play. He is comical, grotesque, stupid, cunning, ambiguous. He is sometimes part animal, and always part something else. The something else is what is so special. He is the dawning godhead in Man."

Siegel has said that the initial inspiration of the character was a Bugs Bunny cartoon he and Joe Shuster saw. What, he wondered, would happen if Superman met someone who played the sort of tricks on him that Bugs played on Elmer Fudd? At the time, he may not even have realized that Bugs is in many ways the modern incarnation of Brer Rabbit, whose adventures were related among black slaves before the Civil War. Many of those stories can be traced to even older sources.

Nevertheless, Siegel was inserting the character into a strip with science-fictional underpinnings, and Mxyztplk's appearance and powers had to be somehow rationalized. A popular book among SF fans of the day was Edwin A. Abbott's nineteenth century satire *Flatland*, about a society of geometrical figures living on a two dimensional plane, and how their society was disrupted by a visiting sphere that could "appear" and "disappear" at will. The implication was clear that a being of four or more dimensions would look equally odd to us, and would be capable of equally inexplicable feats.

Mxyztplk's appearance and name were indicative of such an origin. At one point a newspaper he had been reading was said to have "All the type backwards as though it were reflected in a mirror," a clear reference to the theory that items could be "flipped" in a higher dimension and brought back into three-space as their mirror images. Originally it was not stated exactly how many higher dimensions his world had; but eventually the stories settled on his native Land of Zrfff being a fifth-dimensional world, since Albert Einstein had already indicated *time* was the fourth dimension of our world.

Another suggested inspiration for Mr. Mxyztplk was a character created by Siegel's friend Al Capp. Introduced in *Li'l Abner*, Joe Btfsplk was "the world's worst jinx," and, like Mxyztplk, was a very ugly little man who stood out among more realistically-drawn human beings. Later Superman editor E. Nelson Bridwell pointed out that the characters' names and physical appearance are about the only thing they have in common.

The DC writers and letterers themselves become confused over the years: Alvin Schwartz vies the original pronunciation of the name as "Mixist-a-plick", but many at DC, including Mort Weisinger, referred to him simply by spelling the first four letters of his name.

For all his exotic origins Mr. Mxyztplk was universal and at the same time all-American. His every sentence rang with references to both classical and popular culture. "In popular parlance, pal, *ya got me!* But—can you *hold* me? *That*, paraphrasing Shakespeare, is the $64.00 question!"

Klptzyxm!

The response to that first comic book story was soon clear: the readers did indeed want to see more of Mr. Mxyztplk. The editors couldn't wait for Jerry Siegel to fit a sequel into his military schedule, and commissioned one from Siegel's main scripting backup of the time, Don Cameron. An underrated writer with a fresh sense of humor, Cameron was one of the mainstays of both the Superman and Batman titles of the 1940's. He wrote "Mr. Mxyztplk Returns" in *Action Comics* #80 (January 1945), as well as others involving the character, who this time was prominently featured on the cover.

Cameron and Yarbrough clearly had a lot of fun with the story, as Mxyztplk continued to play tricks on Superman, even in his Clark Kent identity (which he was never to learn), and Lois Lane. Yarbrough's balloons got into the spirit of things, turning upside down as the imp moved a restaurant table with himself and Clark to the ceiling, and fading away as Superman finally tricked a "Klptzyxm" out of the extra-dimensional trickster. For all his powers and wit, Mxyztplk wasn't that bright.

Yet that seeming paradox is another integral part of the Trickster concept. Garner's aforementioned *The Guizer*, indeed, is subtitled "A Book of Fools," and Mr. Mxyztplk, or Mxyzptlk, qualifies in many ways. His profession on Zrfff is that of a court jester, also known as a court fool. But in *Superman* #33 (March-April 1945) Lois Lane and Superman are transported to the Land of Zrfff, where they find King Brpxz is the true Fool who plays with blocks on the floor and allows Mxyztplk to run the kingdom.

Other archetypes of the Trickster include Loki, the Norse god of fire and mischief (turned into an overly debased and evil villain in Jack Kirby's 1960's version of *Thor*) and even the early versions of Merlin. Appropriately, both characters were shown in DC stories to be physical ancestors of the extra-dimensional imp.

One other authentic bit of lore is an integral part of Mxyztplk's concept. The "Klptzyxm" sends him away because it is his own name backwards. Traditionally, one's name can be a powerful source of magic, and even primitive tribes keep a person's true name secret for that reason. Speaking a word backwards is also authentic Gnosticism; witches and warlocks supposedly can do evil by reciting the Lord's Prayer backwards. Later stories established that another inhabitant of Zrfff could return home by saying his or her own name backwards.

But the tale in *Superman* #33 seems to indicate that "Klptzyxm" is universally applicable to anyone. Still, this is the only story that even implies that. After all, Superman's ability to trick the imp would be extremely limited if he could never say "Klptzyxm" himself without going to Zrfff.

Perhaps the word sends others to Zrfff only as an after-effect of Mxyztplk's recently having said it himself. On other occasions, the imp's magic was known to send Earth people to Zrfff if they said their names backwards in his presence. Later stories established that visitors from Earth would return there from Zrfff by saying their names backwards—but only their true names. On a few later occasions Superman would turn the tables by visiting Zrfff and playing a few tricks on the trickster, and even saying "Namrepus" wouldn't send him back—only "Le-Lak" (Kal-El backwards) would do so. In this way, Superman used the traditionsal safeguard against magic that Mxyztplk failed to: keeping himself safe from spells by keeping his true name secret.

Mr. Mxyztplk meets his Bat-equivalent, Bat-Mite, in *World's Finest*.

IT SURE LOOKS THAT WAY, AS...
HMMM...SO YOU'RE BAT-MITE, EH? YOU LOOK PRETTY SILLY TO ME! I'LL BET YOU'RE NOT HALF THE PEST I AM!
I'M NOT A PEST AT ALL... I HELP BATMAN AND ROBIN! BECAUSE I ADMIRE THEM SO, I WANT THEM TO DO THEIR BEST FEATS AND STUNTS, THAT'S WHY I USE MY MAGIC!
6

Perhaps the imp's most significant contribution to the Superman mythos was the introduction of the Bottle City of Kandor. Mxyztplk had shrunk the city and placed it in a bottle, and Superman had to restore it to its proper size. Kandor would be used in many stories, and would be destroyed by Brainiac in the 1960's.

Dangerous Assistance

By Mxyztplk's second appearance in the newspaper strip in 1945, Superman knew the way to get rid of him was to make him say his name backwards. Alvin Schwartz's story has the imp befriending two elderly spinsters who'd won a baking contest, and being inspired by them to become a chef himself. Mxyztplk's new friends persuaded Superman to try to let bygones be bygones, as the little man was in trouble in his own dimension for having given his king a hotfoot! (The King was never seen, but he was clearly a more formidable monarch than poor deluded Brpxz.) But Mxyztplk's ego and extreme irresponsibility soon proved dangerous, as he literally served garbage to his customers and threw out health inspectors, so Superman once again had to trick another "Klptzyxm" out of the imp.

This story was one of several times Mxyztplk genuinely attempted to help people. But his assistance inevitably proved thoughtless and dangerous, as when he saved Lois Lane's niece Susie from a spanking by making her imaginative fabrications come true (teleporting an entire opera stage into the clouds with little regard for how it was to get down again). Superman had his hands full before he managed to sneak the word "Klptzyxm" into some place such as a billboard or a baseball rule book.

Siegel, Cameron and Schwartz found that the character stimulated their imaginations and provided a welcome change from the more traditional hero-villain battles. Further ground rules of the character's magic were becoming established; it could affect even Superman, but the effects would disappear at once when Mxyztplk returned to his dimension.

Other artists besides Yarbrough and

Oh, no! Not *again!!!*

Boring also began to try their hand at the character. In the baseball story "Mr. Mxyztplk Goes to College" in *Superman* #46, John Sikela, after his return to DC in late 1946, finally did get a chance to draw the imp. Mxyztplk looked somewhat different from his earlier appearances; he was much taller and his already-thin and chinless neck was dwindling to near-nonexistence. Despite his skill with more realistically-drawn characters, Sikela wasn't able to capture Mxyztplk.

In "Mr. Mxyztplk Seeks a Wife," by Alvin Schwartz and Win Mortimer, yet another facet of the imp's character was established. After several years of treating Lois Lane merely as one of his favorite victims on Earth, Mxyztplk suddenly proposed marriage to her. The proposal, to be sure, was forced by outside events: back on Zrfff (called "Topsy Turvy Land" in this story) the King had decided Mxyztplk "would do" as a husband for his daughter. Mortimer drew the King and his other subjects as human-sized, though somewhat more ugly—with the princess being the ugliest of all, so the imp's desperate attempt to find a more attractive wife was quite understandable.

Lois accepted Mxyztplk's proposal on the condition that he outdo her as a reporter, figuring that Superman would be forced either to marry her himself or help her win the competition. But this time even Superman was outdone. The wedding ceremony commenced, and only a last-minute objection on Superman's part tricked the imp back home. As for Mxyztplk, he was evidently able to put the princess off, because he remained an ardent ladies' man on his later visits to Earth.

By the 1960's the imp was similarly involved with the equally unattractive Miss Gzptlsnz. She didn't seem to be a princess, but no doubt she had money.

A S-F Turn

In 1948, a dispute over ownership of Superman led to the departure of Siegel and Shuster from DC. Funyman, Siegel's new protagonist for ME Comics, took Mxyztplk's jokes and combinded them with Superman's heroism. John Sikela and another DC artist, Creig Flessel, assisted Shuster on the *Funnyman* art, but the character failed to endure.

Superman himself continued to prosper. The credits were dropped from his comic books, but newspaper strips traditionally had bylines, so the *Superman* strip's long-time artist, Wayne Boring, was now permitted to sign it. With the departure of Shuster, Sikela, and Yarbrough (who also began a newspaper strip, *Tallulah*, which Siegel wrote for a time), Boring was chosen to set the artistic pace for the comic books.

With Ira Yarbrough gone, it would have seemed that the logical artist for Mr. Mxyztplk's comic book stories would be Wayne Boring, But the nod was instead given to Al Plastino. One 1950 story teamed the three most enduring of Superman's foes in a plot that combined Luthor's sinister genius, The Prankster's cunning practical jokes, and Mxyztplk's magic in scheme that took all of Superman's skill to overcome.

With science fiction becoming a more popular genre of comics, even the original fantasy aspect of Mxyztplk's concept began to be muted. The fact that his abilities were magical was downplayed, although never dropped altogether, since it was the only rationale for explaining how he could overcome Superman's otherwise-total invulnerability. Indeed, it was this aspect of Mr. Mxyztplk's power that seems to have been influential in establishing magic, along with kryptonite and red suns, as one of Superman's few weaknesses.

Al Plastino also modified the character's appearance. He was still cartoonishly drawn (his hands were now the four-fingered ones of many animated characters) but he gradually began to develop a real chin and a shock of white hair on the fringes of his bald head. In *Superman* #82, Al Plastino drew him in a tunic and boots similar to the clothes artists gave to aliens. The costume had different colors such as green and blue before coming to be permanently rendered in various shades of orange. Only the little derby remained, but it had become downright tiny.

Even the imp's name didn't remain consistent. William Woolfolk wrote one 1955 story in which he seemed to have trouble remembering which way the name was spelled, and rendered it on several occasions as Mxyzptlk. By 1959, when writer Jerry Coleman wrote the imp's first appearance after a three-year absence, that spelling had become the accepted one, and its pronunciation in the newly-established letter column was "Mix-yez-pitel-ick."

A particularly nasty Mr. Mxyzptlk from *DC Comics Presents.*

BUT YOU CAN'T HEAR ME WAY UP THERE, CAN YOU, SUPER-STUPE?
OF COURSE NOT-- I'VE BEEN TO THAT!
YOU FELL FOR MY LITTLE PLAN, LIKE THE OVERRATED DARE YOU ARE--

All in the Family

Whatever his changes in appearance and name, Mr. Mxyzptlk's imagination didn't flag in the 1950's. He flirted with being a super-hero and a reporter, almost forced Superman to retire by eliminating crime in Metropolis (a development Superman welcomed until he realized Mxyzptlk just transferred the same amount of crime to other places in the world), published a newspaper giving the news in advance, fell in love with several more attractive Earth women, and entered politics both in his own dimension (very rarely named any longer except as the fifth dimension) and on Earth, where he got elected Mayor of Metropolis by fifth-dimensional magic!

"Klptzyxm" (or"Kltpzyxm") was spelled out with alphabet blocks, on eye charts, in alphabet soup, in a speech ostensibly revealing Superman's identity, and innumerable other places; evidently spelling rather than pronouncing it would also send the imp back home. Mxyzptlk fought back by changing his name (at least three times, once to a palindrome), obtaining fifth-dimensional insurance, showing up with laryngitis and lockjaw, staying under water so he couldn't talk, and gimmicking his hat so an alarm rang every time he started saying his name backwards, but Superman always proved equal to the occasion.

Toward the end of the decade, Mr. Mxyzptlk was one of several characters who were now as apt to pop up in a *Lois Lane* or *Jimmy Olsen* story as they were in a Superman's title, and he was rendered by artists like Kurt Schaffenberger and Curt Swan, who saw stories with him as delightful vacations from the norm. Swan gave him back his five-fingered hands, and it was in *Jimmy Olsen* that Mxyzptlk's girlfriend, the aforementioned Miss Gzptlsnz, was introduced. She helped Jimmy when Mxyzptlk (in pursuit of Lucy Lane) turned him into a werewolf, but soon turned Jimmy into a human porcupine when he rejected her own advances.

Jerry Siegel, who returned to DC in the late '50s, wrote a new origin for Mr. Mxyzptlk that appeared in *Superboy* #78 in 1960. As a teenager, he got in trouble with his parents, and ran away through a dimesional warp to Earth. There he switched his alien outfit for Earth clothes, enrolled in Smallville High School, and quickly picked out Superboy as his favorite victim. But Superboy tricked him into saying his name backwards, being tipped off by Mxyzptlk's father, who was waiting for his wayward son with a hairbrush. The the teenage imp decreed that "From now on, it's war!"

This story apparently contradict the original stories which show him making his first appearance after Superman was an adult. Assistant editor E. Nelson Bridwell pointed out that it wasn't beyond Mxyztplk's abilities to make everyone, including Superman, forget him. At least twice he had made everyone on Earth forget Superman himself, and several other times people's memory of his magic, as well as the magic itself, faded away as a side effect of his return to the fifth dimension.

PROVE IT! ONE OF THESE BRICKS IS RED, THE OTHER IS GREEN! READ THE WORD WRITTEN ON THE RED BRICK!
WHY NOT? I'VE GOT A 50-50 CHANCE OF BEING CORRECT!
THIS BRICK! THE WORD IS KLTPZYXM!
GA-AAA! YOU'VE TRICKED ME INTO SAYING MY OWN NAME BACKWARDS... SENDING ME BACK TO MY OWN WORLD!

Oh, *no!* Not again!!

Nevertheless, by this time the character had changed so completely from his original version that most fans tended to prefer an extension of a concept introduced by *Flash* editor Julius Schwartz and writer Gardner Fox in 1961. Fox wrote a classic story establishing that the Golden Age heroes belonged to the parallel world of "Earth-Two." The explanation become official when Schwartz took over editorship of *Superman* in 1970. Mr. Mxyz*ptlk* was indeed a court jester who wore a tuxedo, first met Superman (of Earth-Two) in 1944, and lived in and sometimes ruled a monarchial Zrfff, but Mr. Mxyz*ptlk* was a would-be politician who wore an orange tunic, and first met Superman (of Earth-One) when he was Superboy. His home dimension, however, was another Land of Zrfff, a name soon revived by the historically minded Bridwell.

Curiously enough, the *Superman* newspaper strip, although it followed the new spelling of the character's name, continued to present him in his original appearance and dress until its demise in 1966.

An Overstayed Welcome

Mr. Mxyzptlk was now beginning to influence other comic books. Jack Schiff, who had edited the characters's early appearances and was now editor of the Batman books, worked with writer Bill Finger to introduce a similar character to the Batman series in 1959. In a twist on the original concept, Bat-Mite came to Earth's dimension not to play tricks, but because he was a great admirer of Batman and wished to see his hero in action. Unfortunately, he caused Batman as much trouble as Mxyzptlk did for Superman, because he could rarely resist making things more difficult for Batman in order to witness his most daring stunts. Inevitably, the two imps got together in *World's Finest Comics* and made things almost unbearable for the two heroes, but later became good friends.

Even Stan Lee and Jack Kirby's avant-garde Marvel Comics Group wasn't completely adverse to inspiration from the competition. *Fantastic Four* #1l pitted the company's new super-hero team against The Impossible Man, a cartoonishly drawn alien with almost infinite power and mischief. Fantastic Four leader Reed Richards reached what probably seemed to many long-time Superman readers a logical conclusion: he and his team simply ignored him until he went away in disgust. It clearly worked, because The Impossible Man never showed his face in the comic til after Lee and Kirby's departure. A recent Superman story even dropped broad hints (if rendered unlikely by later developments in both characters) that the two were one and the same.

Mxyzptlk himself was beginning to pall, especially to the older readers. He was now frequently used to explain

DID YOU HONESTLY BELIEVE A FIFTH-DIMENSIONAL SORCERER WOULD RESEMBLE A FUNNY LITTLE MAN IN A DERBY HAT? WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE HOW I REALLY LOOK?
SUPERMAN...H-HE'S CHANGING!
WE'D BETTER GET INSIDE...

In *Action Comics* #583, Alan Moore drastically revised Mxyzptlk . . . and then killed him off. . .

unlikely, often heavily dramatic, situations. A few times this worked, as when the Legion of Super-Heroes was faced in *Adventure Comics* #311 by a mysterious masked dwarf who killed the members off one by one. He was of course revealed to be Superboy's least favorite fifth-dimensional imp—or rather, his great-grandson (life spans were much longer in the fifth dimension, it was explained). A later Legion story had Mask Man's good brother joining the Adult Legion, along with a descendant of Lex Luthor.

Still, by the time Mort Weisinger retired in 1970, most fans had had their fill of Mr. Mxyzptlk, who in the last few years of the editorship had appeared in several weak stories for every strong one. Julius Schwartz at the time had been down playing supervillains even in his other titles. Denny O'Neil, the new star of his stable, who enjoyed a brief stint as Superman's head writer, "seemed to despise super-villains" in the words of one fan.

But in 1971 new writer Elliot Maggin was given several successful shots at the character. He got the go-ahead for a story bringing back Mr. Mxyzptlk in a five-pager tucked away in the back of the book. Even so, "One of Our Imps is Missing" in *Superman* #283 (1975), was probably the funniest Mxyzptlk story in years. He was up to his old tricks, bringing pictures and statues to life in Washington, and sending a confused Lincoln Memorial statue blundering through the streets. Only by using his heat vision to add "Kltpzyxm" to the Gettysburg Address was Superman rid of the imp, but in the final panel he admitted he'd "almost missed the little squirt." So, apparently had the readers.

Mxyzptlk made several more appearances in the next few years, courtesy of Maggin and Martin Pasko. His pranks were once again imaginative and fun, and included placing a modern-day Tower of Babel spell on Metropolis and reversing the sexes of everyone on Earth except Superman. Roy Thomas teamed him up with Captain Marvel's old foe, Mr. Mind the alien worm, to battle Cap and Superman in *DC Comics Presents*, and Mxyzptlk even attempted to find a woman meeting his exacting standards on Zrfff itself—only to find out after the wedding that she was every bit as ugly as the high-placed Zrfffians he'd previously dated.

E. Nelson Bridwell, writing the Earth-Two "Mr. and Mrs. Superman" strip in *Superman Family* even did one story bringing back their universe's original Mr. Mxyzptlk, drawn in an ersatz Yarbrough style by Kurt Schaffenberger.

But as Mxyzptlk worked his way back into a regular spot in Superman's rogues' gallery, he also ran again into his share of less-inspired plotlines. This was especially true as in the early 1980's, when the imp reached his low point in solo stories where he was outwitted by the likes of Krypto the Superdog.

In 1985, writers Marv Wolfman and John Byrne sold DC on a total revamp of Superman that threw out the character's entire past history. Faced with a series that was now a complete dead end, Julius Schwartz used his remaining issues to publish some highly experimental stories.

Steve Gerber's story in *DC Comics Presents* #97 featured nothing less than the apparent destruction of Mr. Mxyzptlk, the entire population of the Phantom Zone, and the Bizarro World, all of them mystically merged into one being. It didn't work as a pre-Crisis story, since both the Bizarro World and some Phantom Zone villains had been shown to have survived into the Legion of Super-Heroes' time, but it did present Mxyzptlk with a son (and an apparently-bigamous marriage), explaining Mask Man and his brother. And after all, however mystically merged the characters were, perhaps a simple 'Kltpzyxm" could restore the status quo.

No such explanation was possible for the final Moore two-parter, considered by many long-time fans to be one of the best Superman stories ever and a fitting finale to the original series. It showed the fall of Superman's direct supporting cast as heroically as that of Camelot or Valhalla. All of his enemies fell, starting with the Toyman and Prankster, then with Luthor and Brainiac, until all but Superman and Lois were dead. Only one major villain, Superman realized, was missing from the list....

Sure enough, Mr. Mxyzptlk appeared, and "he didn't look funny anymore" as Lois later described it. He now claimed to be 6,000 years old, and explained he sought new personalites in an increasingly desperate search for novelty that led him to experiment with pure evil. He had turned the corruptible villains of Superman's world into killers and was now prepared to kill Supereman and Lois himself. Changing into what he claimed was his true form, which "had height, breadth, depth, and a couple of other things," he pursued the two until Superman was forced to bring about his death with Phantom Zone projector. Superman, bound by his pledge to give up his powers and career if he ever deliberately killed, exposed himself to gold kryptonite and assumed another identity as mechanic Jordan Elliot.

Several fans have noted this story's genesis as an idea used by Robert Mayer in his '70s novel *Super Folks*, and the background given by Mxyzptlk doesn't mesh at all with his known past history, but the power of the story is such that these considerations only emphasize the long-overlooked fact that Mxyzptlk, like any guizer or trickster, is a master of lies. What matters *is* his power when he steps out of his previous bounds, bringing about the end of Superman's world just as his ancestor Loki brought about the end of Valhalla, and his question, "Did you honestly believe a fifth-dimensional sorcerer would resemble a funny little man in a derby hat?" sticks in the mind even if the ultimate answer can only be, "Why not?"

A Revisionist Return

After Moore's wrap-up, Byrne quickly brought back most of Superman's major adversaries. The return of Mr. Mxyzptlk was almost inevitable, and he turned up in issue #11 of Byrne's new *Superman* series (1987).

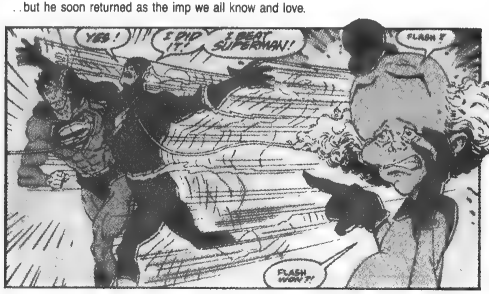
He first appeared as "Ben DeRoy," a mysterious stranger from outside the known universe with almost infinite power. The obvious parody of Marvel's villain The Beyonder and his creator, Jim Shooter (Byrne's former boss at Marvel; they had not parted on the best of terms), who strongly resembled DeRoy, was to the detriment of the story. Even the villain's "true" form and name were said to be only approximations; the name in particular was specifically said to be only a random collection of letters with no relationship to the imp's real one. Getting him to return by saying his name backwards was now only a one-time bargain made by Mr. Mxyzptlk. From then on, Byrne and his successors had the character come up with new, supposedly improved challenges Superman had to meet, such as getting him to paint his face blue and losing a race to the Flash.

The character's appearance was also changed. The name and basic costume of the Earth-One Mxyzptlk remained unchanged (probably because DC had trademarked both), but Byrne's version of Mxyztplk resembled what Plastino's version would look like if he'd been put on Procrustes's bed and stretched. His arms and legs were pipe-thin, his face not a caricature but simply distorted, much like The Impossible Man's. His personality, in keeping with current trends, was decidedly more vicious, as when he put a trolley car full of people in his mouth and smoked it like a cigar. Even the new Lex Luthor, also far more vicious and evil than his pre-*Crisis* counterparts, was seen as a savior by comparison, when he had to face the new Mr. Mxyzptlk in what editor Michael Carlin inaccurately said was their first dual (and duel) appearance.

Yet, like many before them, Byrne and later writers and artists like Jerry Ordway, Roger Stern, and Dan Jurgens have dicovered that Mr. Mxyzptlk *is* a delightful change from the run-of-the-mill characters in appearance and powers. He recently proved an important catalyst in the "Krisis of the Krimson Kryptonite" serial leading up to Clark Kent's engagement.

He even made his live-action debut (portrayed by Michael J. Pollard) on the *Superboy* TV show, in an episode written, ironically enough, by Denny O'Neil. In short, it seems that as long as there is a Superman, there will be a Mr. Mxyzptlk to plague him—and to make sure his writers and artists don't completely lose all sense of humor. ●

. . but he soon returned as the imp we all know and love.



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AMAZING HEROES

REST IN PEACE

"ALMOST GONE, BUT NOT QUITE FORGOTTEN"

Frankly, this section of the magazine is as much for us as it is for you. It's a bit selfish perhaps, but after 11 years and 204 issues, we felt we were entitled to a little navel-gazing.

The following pieces are all by people who were associated with Amazing Heroes, *mostly as contributors, but also as letterhacks, publishers, and other ways. They were mostly written in response to a large mailing I sent out asking people for their thoughts on* Amazing Heroes, *be they good or bad. The number of responses pleased and surprised me, as did their diversity. Most, of course, are quite generous to* AH, *but several are critical, and a few are downright mean. That's the way I wanted to go. Diverse to the end.*

—Thomas Harrington

TRIBUTES

A Farewell Thank You Note

There is much that I have to thank *Amazing Heroes* for.

Thank you, *AH*, for all the pleasure you gave me; I'd been a reader for as long as you were on the stands, Thanks to Mark Waid for his editorial—in *Amazing Heroes* #114, I believe—that entreated me to take further steps toward my lifetime goal of working in comics, of making people I had never met happy. "*Amazing Heroes* needs writers" was how it began, asking for articles for the magazine. I replied with not only an article, but suggestions for other articles, features and ways to improve the magazine.

A large part of this thanks goes to Kim Thompson (or, as I considered him, Mr. *Amazing Heroes*), who contacted me to try out for a part-time/weekend assistant editor's gig. I interviewed—me in a suit, Kim in his trademarked red shorts and Sex Pistols T-shirt—and was offered the position of managing editor. (As I understood it, the person they had chosen for the job was in Canada and the immigration board, or whoever, didn't consider being an editor as a skill and wouldn't issue a work visa. Hmmph.) Though it meant a cut in salary, I took it, and despite warnings to not work the night through ("Do it once and they'll expect you to do it all the time"), I was soon putting in 24, 48, 72 hours at a pop in the house on Kanan Road and the office on Bridgegate Street to grind out the bi-weekly mag. I couldn't do it today.

Further thanks also go to Kim and *AH* for what I learned about editing, organization, endurance, typesetting, and so much more.

To bore you with a few random memories to be thankful for: the parties (including the night I was hired where I met Jack Kirby, Gil Kane, and many others); snippets of sleep in the library; uncountable hours talking with "Doc" Decker about this, that, and other things; Preview Specials; printing my brother's first article; six-packs of Jolt Cola; Kim's uncanny ability to spot a typo from across the room (unrelated to his other uncanny ability to release gas from either orifice with deafening cacophony); people at the office; Inez, Bruce the Poodle, Lynette, all the Hernandezes, Rachel, Tom, and others, even the Big "G" wasn't that much of a pain in his haughty kind of way.

Most importantly, thanks, *AH* for the friendships: Dale Crain, Doug Erb, Shaun McLaughlin, all who made my move to the East Coast and DC Comics (following again in Mark Waid's footsteps—he told me to put that in) a mixed blessing.

Lastly, *AH*, thanks for the opportunity. If it wasn't for you I probably woundn't be where I am today (that's a good thing, yes?).

I could compare what I tried to do with what I accomplished, weigh the overwork with the finished product, but that would be spoiling a pleasantly remembered dream with too much analysis. Let it rest with the fact that I'm proud of the time I spent at *AH*, wouldn't trade it for a world or two.

Sorry to see you go *Amazing Heroes*. You will be missed. You gave me a lot. You gave a lot to others.

Thanks.

KEVIN DOOLEY

Former editor Amazing Heroes
Current editor, DC Comics

Amazing Heroes Epitaph

Amazing Heroes was around when I was a fan, and at every significant point in my professional career. I read about my favorite characters, my favorite artists and (gasp) my favorite critics in its pages, I was reviewed as a fan, as a professional artist and as a writer. I've submitted articles, and pin-up drawings for the Swimsuit issues. I've been interviewed in my turn and once drew a cover for it. During the month I stayed at Casa Fantagraphics, I saw several issues assembled. I count many of the legion of *AH*'s editors as my friends. And now the magazine is dead. Well.

Amazing Heroes was *the* entry level launch pad of the industry. Not only were numerous artists and writers first published here, and almost endless numbers of comics first mentioned in the preview specials, but for a while it seemed that *AH* had supplied half of DC's editorial staff. That was important, but not the *most* important thing.

At a time when the big two were engaged in cut-throat competition, and the various flavors of alternatives had become prickly fiefdoms, *AH* provided a forum where pros and fans could meet and exchange information for the fun of it. It also provided a calm, rational voice as many comic book people elevated their own likes and dislikes to the status of a religion. One felt that *AH* and its editors loved comics without hating the people who produced them (which is rare enough in the world of comic criticism). Was it also occasionally boring? Of course. There were many Hero Histories and checklists I could've done without. But there were a couple I enjoyed, so it evened out.

When I first came into comic fandom, it seemed as though there was commonality between all those who truly enjoyed comics in any form, whether books, strips, mainstream, underground, or fanzines. It was a recognition that the various forms could learn and grow from one another. Now group identification comes not so much from what we love as what we hate. Magazines like *AH* which try to serve the whole community are, I'm afraid, too likeable to command respect in the new age. Too bad. At its best *Amazing Heroes* drew us together. It was an experiment in civility, and Gary and Kim should be commended for publishing is. They won't be, but they should.

WILLIAM MESSNER-LOEBS

Former Resident of the Fantagraphics Commune. Current Writer of Wonder Woman

I was saddened to hear of the end of *Amazing Heroes* magazine, not only because of my memories of producing it but also because of what it may signify.

I always believed that it offered a good variety of articles and other pieces to satisfy comic readers from different backgrounds. About anyone could find something of interest or learn something new.

Amazing Heroes' end may be indicating that readers want a narrower, more "special interest" focus in their comics supplements. Maybe they know exactly what they like and want to see nothing but their genre.

I've always been for having a well-rounded, informed education about any one topic, for if you don't know what else is out there, how would you know why your favorite subject is so good? Where's the comparison? Where's the education? *Amazing Heroes* offered a platform to sample and learn about all the different aspects of comics so readers could make discriminating choices.

The two years that I spent putting together (literally) the magazines as Art Director were a great time of growth and discovery for me. I thoroughly enjoyed working with Kim Thompson, Kevin Dooley, Bruce Walrad, Doug Erb, Dale Crain, Mark Thompson, Roberta Gregory, Greg and Juniper Baisden, Robert Boyd, Dale Yarger, oh yeah, Chris McCubbin and all the others who passed through Fantagraphics at one time or another. It was such an intellectually stimulating, love-of-learning, creative place to work—I hope it is still that.

LYNETTE ALCORN-McCUBBIN

Art Director of Amazing Heroes *1988-1990. Presently Production Artist with Best Printing Co. in Austin, TX*

Well, he's gone...

I wish I could say I was surprised.

Politically, morally I've always been what I call a radical moderate—"death to all extremists." Comic books, right now, are the exclusive preserve of several different tribes of fanboy extremists, all with their own little territories carved out and completely convinced that the other tribes are savage drooling barbarians. You know what...they're all right.

There's the good old Super-hero Zombies over here. You know them. I won't insult them any more. No point in flogging an undead horse.

Camped nearby are a newer tribe, an offshoot of the Zombies. The speculators. They wouldn't know a work of art if it bit them on the ass, but they know what's hot, and if it's hot they'll grab it and seal it in a baggie and keep it in their basement until it's even hotter, then they'll sell it to another Speculator. What fun.

Over here, on the other side of the river, are the elitist pygmies, a stunted angry tribe, small in numbers but fanatical in their jihad against the mighty zombie nation (which has been successfully ignoring them for decades, and will probably continue to do so). This bunch is more civilized than their more numerous cousins. They do know a good comic when they see it—as long as it's their kind of good comic. They'll tell you that a comic needs to be realistic to be worthwhile. Low key. Grown up. Preferably depressing. If fantasy is to be tolerated at all, it has to be dark and ironic and fraught with symbolism.

And in the middle of this mess the crazy old coot with the corny name of *Amazing Heroes* has been standing for a decade and more, yelling at the pygmies that the spirit of Beck and Kirby and Cole is still alive in the super-

No No NO, Fraau Barr! They're nice boys and they MEANT well!
HELL IS PAVED WITH GOOD INTENTIONS.
Is that a 9 mm Intention?
DONNA BARR 1990

DONNA BARR

One-time Employee of Fantagraphics (thank you, Kim) and detailing partygoer, and right now working on The Desert Peach *as always.*

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hero comics—no matter how sick and perverted it may be at the moment, and that spirit needs to be nurtured and healed, not left to rot at the hands of the zombies. Then he turns to the Zombies and cries out that they don't need muscles and tights and fists and guns to enjoy a comic; that it's OK to let a comic book speak to your head or your heart, and not just to your gut. Then he turns to a Speculator Zombies and for the first time he looses his temper—and he screams to the zombies to *Just Open the Damn Book Already*—just once. Let it become dogeared and grimy and faded. An eternity entombed in mylar is a comic book's hell.

Well, the crazy old coot is gone now. For awhile he was interesting, but now the novelty is gone. The Tribes all have their own magazines now. They don't need *AH* and his blasphemous message of tolerance, intelligence and good old-fashioned fun anymore. Lock him up some place far off and out of the way—the comic book racks are mighty crowded, and it's time to give his space over to something one or the other (but never, ever, all) of the tribes can get behind.

If you ask me (and no one has) it's a god damned shame.

Oh well, nothing lasts forever. Maybe, somewhere, sometime, somebody listened to the old coot, and remembered something he said. Maybe somebody, someday will be back with the message, "There are only two kinds of comic books—good and bad—and the difference between the two has nothing whatsoever to do with which tribe created it." I'll be waiting for that call, and I'll know it when I hear it.

I'm not mad at Gary and Kim. I'm grateful to them, for getting me started doing something I love, when so many people I know are getting trapped in jobs that mean nothing to them. I learned a lot at *AH*. I met a lot of fascinating people. My wife listed most of them who we worked with every day, so I won't repeat that list. I'll just add my fond memories of all the freelance journalists, reviewers, columnists, letter writers and comic-book creators that my time at *AH* allowed me to meet. Kim and Gary gave me a chance to meet those people. And I can't blame them for not keeping on with something their hearts have never really been in anyway. It's just . . . it's just a goddamn shame, is all.

CHRIS W. McCUBBIN

Managing Editor 1988-89. Presently working for Steve Jackson Games in Austin, TX, where he's an editor, art director and author of 5 books, including the Gamer's Choice Award-Winning GURPS Fantasy Folk

Memories of *Amazing Heroes*? Hmmm . . .

Coming into the office in the morning to find my desk, chair, and lamp covered with streamers of copy to be pasted up, then editor Kevin Dooley sitting glassy-eyed in the comics library after pulling yet another all-nighter to meet his deadline. An issue featuring Michael Jackson on the cover, his skin mistakenly given a gray tone that fell somewhere on the color scale between an elephant and rain-drenched pavement. Dragging Kevin away from his desk for a "manager's special" lunch. The constant argument over, "Who's stronger, the Thing or the Hulk?" The fear of a Preview Special, morning donuts with Dale Crain. The "How about . . ." letters of Peter Garcia. A blonde-haired production assistant who graduated from UCLA with a degree in art and yet hadn't a clue as to Andy Warhol was. Yep, them there were *Amazin'* times . . .

DOUG ERB

Former art director on Amazing Heroes

When I took over the managing editor postiion at *Amazing Heroes*, I was fresh out of a Wisconsin college. The culture shock of the move to Connecticut required some adjustments, but I soon grew into the environment. It was my first exposure to the inner workings of the comic book industry. Working at Fantagraphics Books was an eye-opening experience.

The best thing about the job was the people. I met a wide variety through my association with *Amazing Heroes*, many that I still work with and talk with on a regular basis. Some of them were new to me and some I had only known through their credits in the pages of the comics I read.

Tom Mason, my business partner and best friend, was the art director on the magazine while I served as managing editor.

I'll always be grateful for the experience I gained from working on *Amazing Heroes*. It changed my life in a distinct and permanent way. I'm sad to see it go.

DAVE OLBRICH

Former AH *editor. Current owner/publisher of Malibu Comics.*

Final Thoughts

In the early days of comics fandom, back in the '60s, a lot of things that are now common knowledge just weren't known. Comic books had been appearing since the late '30s, but hardly anyone knew much about that quarter-century history. This was before books had been written to put the data in easily accessible form, and before price guides had been published to list titles and issue runs.

As comics fandom grew and collectors contacted each other, there was a need to swap the information they were accumulating. This was before professional magazines like *Amazing Heroes* and the *Comic Buyer's Guide*, after all. So the fans published their own magazines, or fanzines. They were crude: printed on home mimeographs in the basement with print runs of maybe 200 copies or less, stapled, and sent out for a token price or even free.

The fanzines were where the fans and collectors published their checklist of titles, issue numbers, and artists, their survey articles of old comic books and review of new ones, and their interviews with retired or current professionals. By exchanging information, those pioneering fans laid the ground work and did the research that put comic-book history and collecting on a solid basis.

As the '70s wore into the '80s, the field professionalized. Most of the old home-made fanzines fell by the wayside, their mission accomplished. The information collected over the decades was out there: the history of comics could be read in any number of books on sale at Walden's or B. Dalton's, while the raw bibliographic data was updated every year in the Overstreet Price Guide, what remained to be done was filling in a lost few details, determining whether Arist X drew some strip in some issue of a comic book or a house hack aping his style, or whether the advertised ninth issue of Y Comics was ever actually published.

Yet that first primitive fanzine that rolled out of the basement duplicator in 1961 or so had a distant descendant in *Amazing heroes*, in gung-ho fan spirit if nothing else. Sure, we know pretty much what was in every issue of every comic book ever published, but why do we care? The fanzines were more than checklists, dry overviews, and historical interviews: they were also places where the fans got together to talk about comics and share their enthusiasms, I like to compare them to that corner of the playground where the kids gathered at recess to trade comics and talk about their favorites, and even with typesetting and color covers, *Amazing Heroes* had something of that atmosphere.

The comics field is changing again, it looks like. *Amazing Heroes* is shutting down and fandom will be a little colder for its loss. I've been hanging around *Amazing Heroes* almost since its beginning all those years ago and I've contributed a slew of articles and reviews, not to mention 50 installments of a regular column.

Even so, I've always wished *Amazing Heroes* well, and I've always hoped I might be able to come back sometime when the batteries had charged. Now it looks like *Amazing Heroes*will have to come back before I can. Still, *Amazing Heroes* lasted over a decade, a phenomenal record in this field, and did more than its share in giving fans a place to exchange information and opinion.

Comics are more than just weird collectibles, after all, Unlike stamps, coins, or plates with paintings on them there's something *in* comics beyond their material composition or production-run variants. Comics are art and story, and at their best, the expression of their creator's talents and their readers' dreams. For over ten years, *Amazing Heroes* was the corner of the playground where fans came to swap their stories of what made *them* interested in comics.

I'll miss it. Good luck, guys, and come back soon.

DWIGHT R. DECKER

Columnist

Dear Amazing Memories:

Memories, like the corners of my bench saw.

I guess what I'll always remember about *Amazing Heroes* is that it was a great way to meet people! So many different editors, art directors, interns, assistants and miscellaneous hangers-on worked with me over the past 10 years that I can't even begin to name them all. I think I remember most of the editors: Mark Waid, Kevin Dooley, Dave Olbrich, Dave Smay, Chris McCubbin, Art Cover, and last but certainly not least, Tom Harrington. I must be forgetting someone. Some of these gentlemen have remained good friends of mine, and some have faded in the mists of "What ever happened to . . .?" but I guess I learned something from *each and every one*.

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One name towers above all others when I think of *AH*: Kim Thompson. It was Kim who first asked me to write for *AH*, and Kim who saw me through many, many blown deadlines through the years. Thanks, Kim, from the bottom of my heart.

The other thing I'll miss about *AH* is those goldurned Preview Specials. I worked on every one, and each had its nighmarish aspects, though for me nothing can top the second. It was 1984 and I had conned Kim into giving me almost all the plum assignments—interviewing colorful, verbose folks like Dave Sim, Howard Chaykin, the Hernandez Brothers, Bob Burden, Mike Baron, Scott McCloud and a bunch more.

I was very excited by the assignment, but I had one small problem: I was living in a tent with my grandparents at the time, and the only possessions I had were a wee manual typewriter, a teeny battery-operated tape recorder and one of those $2 suction-cup thingies you get at Radio Shack for recording phone calls. Bag lady-like, I would go to the public libarary to use the phone, then sit in the back of the car, transcribing and writing. On rainy days I would just stay in my sleeping bag, typing away, a cup of hot instant coffee my only comrade. . . yes, those were the days. I think this experience taught me more about writing (and life) than anything I've ever gone through. . . if I could write under those conditions, I could handle just about anything. And I *know* that's where my addiction to caffeine began.

Well, enough about me. There have been many writers whose work I enjoyed in *AH*: Peter Sanderson, Scott McCloud, Gerry Jones, Don Rosa, Sydney Mellon, Andy Mangels. In fact, Andy's article on comics and homosexuality stands out as a very courageous piece, and proof that *AH* wasn't all fluff.

But that's all over now. Hiatus beckons. Here we are at the end of the trail. Writing for *Amazing Heroes* meant a great deal to me professionally, and gave me a forum to spout off a lot of opinons, and most important of all, a chance to talk to *you*, the readers. We did it all for you, guys. I hope you appreciated it.

So here's to all you 10,000-odd readers, and all 78,000 production people who worked on *AH*. Someday we'll rent out the Rose Bowl and have an *Amazing Heroes* reunion.

HEIDI MacDONALD
Columnist, reporter

Heroes Amazin', Heroes A-Fadin'

So *Amazing Heroes* is being cancelled. Big wow. Big double wow with extra cheese on top. I mean, you talk like this is some big awesome historical event that's ending, but all I see is a bunch of little fantasies about superheroes while most of us have matured into far more important things. You worry about *Amazing Heroes* going under when the *Comics Buyers Guide* is still out there with a column by Major Pro Mr. Peter David! You worry about *Amazing Heroes* going under when everybody knows *Wizard* has much better news about the Hot Marvel books!

Do you call this Maturity?

Ha! Maturity is knowing when to stop being a fanboy columnist and making that long, painful—aye, sometimes 'twould seem endless!—transition to Prodom. A turning that most of us made long ago. Maturity is knowing that writing ABOUT mythic heroes is just silly masticatory fantasy! Maturity is CREATING your OWN mythic heroes! Maturity is devoting yourself to your own epic line of creator-owned masterpieces, and persisting though the whole world—even Malibu Graphics!—gives nothing but reprobation!

Maturity is saying, "I am fanboy no more. . . from this day you shall call me Creator!" Yeah. THAT'S maturity. But it seems like the only way YOU guys can learn that is by having the Fantagraphics Corporation boot you out of your offices!

So I say to *Amazing Heroes*. . don't just drop dead! GET A LIFE! Like Sidney Mellon!

SIDNEY MELLON
Professional writer person

Dear Thomas,

RE: The demise of Amazing Heroes.

Reasons why it's a good thing:
1. Conflict of interest. It's hard to be objective about comic book publishing when you're owned by a comic book publisher.
2. Narrow minded by design. A publication which is supposed to be about the potentially vast spectrum of comics should not be called *Amazing Heroes*. This perpetuates the false idea that comics must be limited to heroes, an idea primarily responsible for the stagnant state of the industry today.

Reasons why it's a bad thing:
1. The more the better. When a voice is silenced, there is one less point of view to be considered, and a free society always welcomes diversity.
2. Its replacements (*Wizard*, *Comic Values Monthly*) focus too much on the speculative aspect of comics, a trend which leads the industry down a path which cheapens comics as an art form, and strips it of its value as a communications form. Also, Diamond's *Previews* and Capital City's *Advance Comics* are primarily catalogs and have severe objectivity problems.

TODD LOREN
Publisher Revolutionary Comics

I'd be happy to share my many fond memories of *Amazing Heroes* with your readers—the confidence that came with wearing the sharp blue uniform, the weekly meetings, the craft lessons, the campfire singalongs—wait a minute, that was the Cub Scouts! I don't know *why* I always get those two confused!

Now I remember. *Amazing Heroes* is the entertaining, informative magazine I've been choosing as my favorite in the *Comics Buyer's Guide* awards for years. I'm going to miss this magazine. A lot.

Hurry back, guys. We need the competition.

TONY ISABELLA
Used to write "Everett True" cartoons for both AH *and* The Comics Journal. *But he swears he never inhaled. Presently, he writes a weekly humor/review column for* CBG, *wherein he has recently declared his candidacy for President of the United States. If that doesn't pan out, Tony will continue to write comic books for a variety of publishers.*

I was hired as the editor of *Amazing Heroes* in February of '86, and had my name on the masthead of issues #90 through #101. My tenure as editor coincided with the publication of *Dark Knight*, *The Watchmen*, and *Elektra* and, consequently, an unprecedented amount of major media coverage for the comic book industry.

Professionally, I would have to say that revamping the magazine with my art director, Dale Crain was the best part of the job. It's gratifying that some of the features I initiated survived ("Perspective," "Ten of a Kind"). The worst part of doing the job was wading through the maddeningly dweebish hero histories, some so poorly written they were grueling to edit. Oh yes, and answering those idiotic letters. I was acutely aware that I was almost certainly the only editor in America whose freelance staff was comprised entirely of chunky, pasty, 32-year olds who still lived with their mothers.

I loved working with Dale. He was completely professional, talented, creative. I also enjoyed writing the editorials. I got some powerful feedback from people I respected in the industry, notably Dick Giordano and Steve Rude. One of my editorials even earned me a lunch invitation at Harlan Ellison's house (deep in the reaches of Thousand Oaks, surrounded by ranch houses, stands Ellison's Wonderland—gargoyles dripping from the eaves.)

Personally, I have some very fond memories of working at Fantagraphics. Cutting Julie Strnad's hair on the back porch early in the morning before everybody got to work, shmoozing about baseball or catching up in some greasy gossip with Tom Mason. (Did you hear the one about Cat Yronwode flashing her denuded pussy? How about Gary Groth's liason with two prostitutes in Amsterdam as financed by Aline Kominsky?) Zooming into L.A. in Dave Nelson's bomb, his oil paints in the footwell, to catch Red Kross or Jane's Addiction in some Hollywood dive (in '86, mind you), cruising down to Malibu on our lunch break in Dale's convertible, rubbing Inez's shoulders (or pulling her chain) while she was typesetting, chatting about the Pogues with Jan Strnad or the Stooges with Kim (whose taste in music was in inverse proportion to his taste in clothing), wheedling a writing commitment out of Heidi MacDonald, getting the Hollywood scoop from Valerio, bopping around the San Diego convention with Kim Fryer and shooting pool with the lot of them at Barbey's Beanery, drinking beer, and scarfing down chili cheese fries. I worked with some very bright, funny, talented people. That was a pleasure.

The primary perk at Fantagraphics was meeting the creators (i.e. starfucking): Jack Kirby, Gil Kane, Dave Stevens, Drew Friedman, etc. I got to see Bob Burden get goofy at the San Diego convention (which, as you imagine, set new standards in goof). The best by far was getting to acquainted with Los Bros. Hernandez.

I was fired from Fantagraphics in June of '86 (with six weeks notice), so obviously I have some mixed feelings about the. . uhm, capricious managerial style of Kim and Gary. I wasn't Kim's first choice for editor—Mark Waid was. But Waid wouldn't leave his wife and Texas for such paltry pay. That did not deter Kim from courting Mark behind my back as I worked there. Finally, Kim upped the pay to Mark's standards, and I was dumped. I did have the satisfaction of seeing Mark fired only four months after I was (I think Gary decided Mark was being paid too much). This actually turned out to be a good career move for Mark. Not only did he land his long-coveted job at DC, but he screwed Fantagraphics bigtime on his way out. (Ask Kim and Gary about their sudden relocation after the local zoning commission was notified that a small publishing company was operating out of a private home.)

Still, working at Fantagraphics was a positive experience for me. I was allowed a free hand with the magazine, I got along well with Kim and Gary (previous to my firing), and, as I noted, I worked with some very fun people.

Anyway, I moved to San Francisco and my sex life improved almost instantly upon leaving the comic book industry (funny how that works). I'm currently living with my girlfriend, writing and slacking, and that's about it. I'd like to send my regards to Dale Crain, Jan and Julie Strnad, Tom Mason, Dave Nelson, Inez, Kim Fryer, and Los Bros. Give me a call if you're in the Bay area (I'm in the book), and the beer's on me.

DAVID SMAY
Managing Editor, February-July 1986

Kim Thompson Replies: David Smay's entitled to be a little self-serving if he wants to—hey, this is *Amazing Heroes*, after all—but his poor-pitiful-me job history is wrong. Let me set the record straight, for those few who care (and also to offer a postscript of the Mark Waid era, for what it's worth).

I did indeed always believe that Mark would make a better editor for *Amazing Heroes* than Dave, and I think printed issues bear this out: Mark's issues are tighter, smarter, much better edited, and more inventive than Dave's. Dave was asked to leave in large part because he wasn't up to the pressures of the job: he essentially pooped out during the *Amazing Heroes Preview Special*, dumping most of the labor in my lap. (Strategy note, Dave: If your arguments rests on what a fine job you did, it's not clever to emphasize with such pride your identity as a "slacker.") It's entirely possible I would have fired Dave after that even if Mark *hadn't* reconsidered at the time and accepted the job. And if I was being mean and underhanded, I sure wouldn't have given Dave the relatively princely six weeks' notice.

Dave's conjectures about Waid's firings are completely off the mark (so to speak). Mark was asked to leave because

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of his erratic and often downright poisonous personality and behavior. It is worth noting that a year later, Mark was fired from his subsequent job at DC under extremely bitter circumstances—due to much the same sort of excess that had put the kibosh on his *Amazing Heroes* gig. I know Mark thinks he got edged out of the job partly because of his higher salary, but I guess this belief is more comforting to him than the truth (namely that every single person in the Fantagraphics office, with the exception of the one he was sleeping with, loathed him and wanted him out of there).

Finally, if Mark did indeed turn us in to the zoning commission, it was pretty flaccid revenge, since we only started getting hassled on the subject a month *after* we'd relocated the Fantagraphics offices to a nice new office complex ten miles down the road. (We moved because we'd simply grown too big for our earlier digs.) Gary and I had many a laugh at our narrow escape from the commissioners, and learning that this was a failed sabotage attempt from Mark just gave us another round of chuckles. So I'll close off by thanking Dave for brightening our day and wishing him well in his future endeavors.

Though I'd long suspected that, in a marketplace increasingly dominated by price guides and holograms, *Amazing Heroes* was fast becoming a lumbering dinosaur, I was nevertheless shocked to learn that it was officially Going Under. Hearing the news was like going to visit your old Catholic grade school only to find it engulfed in flames.

My emotions are mixed. On the one hand, *AH* formed the single most important stepping-stone in my comics career, so it'll always hold a fond place in my heart. On the other hand, anything that causes Fantagraphics any further financial distress—like the death of its longtime cash cow—makes me dance. My feelings might be a bit less tinged with acrimony had I not left Fantagraphics' employ with Gary Groth's footprint on my ass, but that's neither here nor there.

For five action-packed months—from August to December of 1986—I edited *Amazing Heroes*. During my tenure, I brought in writers like Nancy Collins, Gerard Jones, Michael Eury, and Jim Korkis, introduced a groundbreaking level of snideness to the letters column, and, on a fever-pitch roll, concocted and instituted the *AH Swimsuit Special*, heedless of Kim Thompson's sputtering yet charmingly bemused objections. On the other hand, I also printed an interview with Lyle Waggoner, ran a Green Lantern Hero History so boring it would put an amphetamine addict to sleep, and called Jim Salicrup a Nazi in print, so I guess it all evens out. (I'm convinced that the Waggoner interview, having since opened the doors for those *countless hundreds of thousands* of Backstage interviews with Lynda Carter's stuntwoman, John Wesley Shipp's podiatrist and *Swamp Thing*'s moss wrangler, has earned me a special place in Hell. There I'll be, ankle-deep in boiling sewage for all eternity comforted only by the knowledge that I'm standing on Gary's shoulders.)

I wish I could regale you with fun little anecdotes about my time with Fantagraphics, but I've spent five years trying to forget them. Besides, if you work in the comics industry, you've probably already heard most of them. Their legend precedes me, though no matter *what* you've heard, I *never* threw a typewriter at R. Fiore.

Goodbye, *Amazing Heroes*. Regardless of the circumstances, I'm still proudest of the work I did with you. I'll never have that kind of creative freedom again.

MARK WAID

Member, Legion of Former Amazing Heroes *Editors; Current writer of* Flash *and* Justice League Quarterly

P.S. Ty Templeton says goodbye, too. He's just too sad to write.

I must admit that when *Amazing Heroes* stopped running the work of the great Sidney Mellon, it already went into indefinite hiatus in my heart.

However, I *am* a bit disappointed that the cancellation of *AH* means I can never do "Barbie Meets the Bad Girls" in your swimsuit issue. ("Omigoodness, Skipper, look at all those—gasp—tiny, scratchy *lines*!")

TRINA ROBBINS

Cartoonist

Tom Harrington Replies: Fear not, Trina. *Amazing Heroes* may be dead, but *The Amazing Heroes Swimsuit Special* lives on!

Amazing Heroes was the first publication to give me money for something I'd written. Ask any writer and he (or she) will tell you the same thing—your first publication is like your first really good sex. No more groping with essays in high school and college classes; no more dryhumping with freebie weekly slacker newspapers. It's for real—there's the payoff. Admittedly, not much, but who cares?

A piece of advice—if you are a writer and this hasn't happened yet, make sure that when it does you spend that money on something really frivolous. Don't pay your phone bill. Don't deposit it in your checking account. Immediately cash it and spend it on the first cool thing you think of. You'll thank me for this.

But, to be honest, I'm not entirely sorry to have it end. I didn't want to quit because it's been fun, especially "A Few Words," and easy and familiar. (Yes, I've always had a hard time ending relationships.) So, it's over and I'll always look back on it fondly. Time to get on with the hard stuff.

Thanks, Kevin. Thanks, Chris. Thanks, Kim. Thanks, Tom.

Adios. Au revoir. Goodbye.

JEFF LANG

is the creator and writer of Roadways *and* Creatures of the Id. *He has also contributed to Now's* Twilight Zone, *Warner International Publishing's* Tiny Toon Adventures, *and Iconographix's* Monkey Wrench. *He's currently working on a half-dozen projects that somebody better buy or he's going to publish them himself*

Amazing Heroes saved my sanity and gave me a self-confidence I never had before. I was one of those geeky kids in school, skinny with glasses. I was never into sports but art and theater. A day didn't go by where I wasn't put down and often beat up because of my interests, I began to feel that there was something wrong with me because I enjoyed drawing and writing and avoided sports, drinking and drugs.

I had always had an interest in "Popeye." When I learned that *Amazing Heroes* published art from the readership, I took a drawing I had done of the spinach-eating sailor and sent it in. About a month later I received a phone call from the offices of *Amazing Heroes* informing me my drawing would be printed in issue #87, January 1986. I was filled with self-confidence and pride to realize that there actually were other people out there interested in the same things that I was.

My writing career really began with that single Popeye drawing published in *Amazing Heroes*. It showed me that people should stick with their interests, despite what others may think or do to make them act otherwise. Like Popeye says: "I Yam what I Yam."

FRED GRANDINETTI

Several drawings and two articles published in Amazing Heroes. *Co-Founder of "The International Popeye Fan Club" and freelance writer by night, data entry clerk by day.*

To whom it may concern.

So *Amazing Heroes* is being cancelled. Will I miss it? No. I haven't read it in years. I am suprised, though. Back in the early '80s it was a cash cow, seemingly supporting the rest of Fantagraphics' publications. I guess fandom has changed in the past decade, and *AH*'s approach is out of sync with the concern with market values that mark the modern comic reader. I'll miss more of what it represents than the actual magazine—where else will young comic fans get their in-depth histories of the Legion of Super-Pets?

Working at Fantagraphics was and probably remains, no picnic. I remember being frustrated that as news editor and keeper of checklists (which *The Comics Journal* also ran), I should have been expected to know what was going on in comics, and comic fandom. Whenever I displayed too much curiosity (looking up from my desk when the mail arrived, or reading other fanzines, like *The Comic Reader*), I would be castigated for "hovering." That became my nickname: "The Hoverer." Still, it was one of the kinder nicknames around the office; I learned to live with it.

A few other memories of *Amazing Heroes*:

The first Preview Issue (#39) grew in size beyond anyone's expectations. As a staff flunky, I was stuck with writing up previews for crap titles Kim Thompson or the freelancers didn't want—heavy-hitters like Peter Sanderson and Frank Plowright had already claimed the best and most interesting titles. I was proud at the time for being able to convince people to speak on the record who otherwise would have nothing to do with Fantagraphics (Jim Steranko, Larry Hama, etc.).

For an *AH* cover of Jack Kirby's New Gods (#47), art director Tom Mason made the dynamite stick in a character's mouth a little less red, and a little more flesh-colored, than was absolutely necessary . . . it was good for a laugh.

Whatever DID happen to Joe Kubert's The Redeemer, anyway?

I wrote most of one issue (#46), including a Power Pack preview, but used a pseudonym rather than have my name appear five or six times in the table of contents. I regret it now—that would have been cool.

While the staff worked at their desks or art tables, Kim would play the same records over and over again—mostly the Velvet Underground and Lou Reed. His desire to stay on top of early '80s new wave music led him to subject the rest of the staff to the likes of Nena, Hilary and other sorry synth-pop shit. The fool—he could have been listening to the Fall and early Replacements.

I was blown away by Alan Moore's "The Anatomy Lesson," his second *Swamp Thing* story, but found it difficult to convince anyone else on staff to read it. Eventually, they did, and Kim called up Moore in England to

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chat, and was gratified to hear he was a tremendous fan of *Love and Rockets* (then only a few issues old).

The best thing about working on *Amazing Heroes* was that it was time away from *The Comics Journal*, and Kim was usually easier to deal with than Gary Groth. Gary used humiliation and fear to control his employees: Kim was some what more subtle. Still, the longer I worked in comics (if just on the fringes) the less fun they became to read—a common problem, I think, when your hobby becomes your job. After leaving Fantagraphics I continued to write for fan publications (including *AH*); for a year or two, then quit for good. As a result, comics eventually become fun to read again—the joy in my childhood hobby returned. I recommend this to anyone who works in comics, or in fandom, who wonders why comics have lost their magic. . . Quit! Quit now! Get a real job. Don't go to conventions more than once every few years, at most. In person, comics pros aren't gods, bigger than life, or even particularly pleasant (I remember a DC editor arriving at the Fantagraphics house, and the first words he snarled at Kim were, "You look well fed"). The closer you get to the source, the more comics seem like just another petty dog-eat-dog bullshit business. Keep your distance, and you can keep those childhood fantasies intact. If that's what you want.

STEVE FREITAG

Fantagraphics news editor, 1983-84. Now a feature writer at a daily newspaper in Connecticut.

Kim Thompson Replies: Funny thing: the way I remember it, it was the Ex-Hoverer himself who played the Velvet Underground overandoverandover until everyone got good and sick and tired of them. Even me—it was year before I could listen to "Loaded" again. But then, I had Iggy Pop/Stooges in heavy rotation day in and day out, so who am I to talk? I'll cop to playing Hilary (still do), and I'm grateful to see that Steve did not mention my flirtations with such '80s synth-abominations as Haysi Fantayzee and Missing Persons, but I must emphasize here, now and forevermore that I have never owned or even *thought* of buying a Nena single or album—although I may have failed to switch channels once or twice when she popped up on MTV singing her hit "99 Luftballoons," that's only because she's a cute li'l thing. Anyway, isn't this the musical equivalent of the kind of culture-snobbery *Amazing Heroes* was supposed to take a stand against?

My thoughts on *Amazing Heroes*?

First time I was paid for my writing (causing me to jump up and down with joy): *Amazing Heroes* #96, for *Super-Yuppie* under the pen name "Dave Wave" (used only once).

My favorite *Amazing Heroes* controversy: Andy Mangels's and Adam-Troy Castro's and Tom Harrington's replies to the letters about Andy's comments about the outing of the Flash, I mean Mr. Shipp.

My least favorite *Amazing Heroes* controversy: Anything written by Danny DeAngelo.

My top three favorite *Amazing Heroes* features: The Cartoonist, Backstage, Infernal Gall.

Oh, all right, Tom: I like the editorials, too.

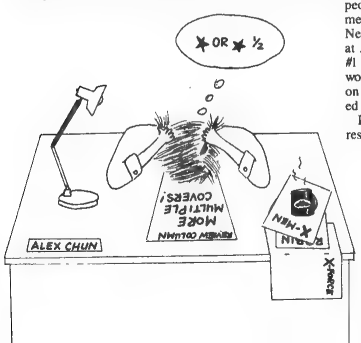
The *Amazing Heroes* employees I want to meet the most at the August San Diego Comic Con: the Writers (and artists, Teri) of the above four features.

Percentage of comic book shop employees or managers who, upon my telling them that *Amazing Heroes* was being cancelled, told me they will miss it: 100

DAVID STROM

Writer of "Strom's Index." Occupation: Technical Writer. What I'm doing now: Moving my Commodore 128 disk files over to IBM disks before the 128 blows up. What I will do: Try to sell other articles, a story or two, and another column (one that can be syndicated for fame and more money and the chance to trash Cal Thomas)

I wanted to let you know how much I have enjoyed the experience of working for *Amazing Heroes*. During the last two years I have had a lot of fun reviewing books, especially through the columns, and it was nice to learn that people actually read them (Scott Rosenberg at Malibu mentioned how much he liked my columns, while Dan Necroses, a letterer for Archie, told me that the people at Archie were incensed after reading my *Little Archie* #1 review). I'm also glad to have had the opportunity to work with you as an editor. I enjoyed speaking with you on the phone, and I appreciate the flexibility you allowed me.



I wish you the best of luck, and I look forward to the resurrection of *Amazing Heroes*.

ALEX CHUN

Reviewer, interviewer of the Image Comic group

Somewhere, Danny DeAngelo is laughing.

ADAM-TROY CASTRO

Columnist

Back in 1985, when I started reading *Amazing Heroes*, only in my wildest imaginings did I ever think *I* would write for it.

Before I ever took finger to keyboard, I admired *AH* for its honest and thorough examination of the comics industry. It looked back on its past with fondness, realizing the affecion the readers had for those old days and characters, Yet it was also up-to-date, duly recognizing the new wave of comics and never pretending everything was ideal today.

It demanded quality, and didn't hesitate to speak out when it wasn't present. But *AH* never really denouced escapist genre comics, unlike its sister publication, *The Comics Journal*. *AH* charted developments like *Watchmen* and *The Dark Knight* and hoped the trend would continue.

Amazing Heroes was never about how many copies a title sold, how much it would be worth or whether it would become a major motion picture. First and foremost, it was about the work and the people who made it. That's why it's always been my favorite magazine and I'm proud to have been a part of it.

Writing for *Amazing Heroes* had been great fun. Yes, I've lost weeks of sleep and maybe added a couple of points to my blood pressure, but it was all worth it. I've spoken with dozens of outstandingly talented people and done my small bit to help them by promoting their efforts.

As I say good-bye, I'd like to thank four real life "amazing heroes." Tom Harrington, Chris McCubbin, Kevin Dooley, and especially Mark Waid, whose "*Amazing Heroes* needs writers" editorial in *AH* #107 got me started.

Thanks, guys.

DARWIN McPHERSON

A feature writer and former reviewer for AH, *now writes promotional copy for DC Comics and continues his monthly review column, "Sequences," in the Buffalo, NY area paper,* Artvoice.

I think the reason I liked *Amazing Heroes* was because of its attitude. It neither cursed you for liking the odd superheroes or was so caught up in the latest X-title that it made you feel like an idiot to be reading comics at all. I always liked the fact that *Amazing Heroes* thought nothing of placing an in-depth interview with Matt Howarth next to a hero history of Herbie Popnecker without apologies. It was a magazine that paid attention to all manner of comic books, even failed lines like Atlas and the Harvey Super-Hero line.

With this last issue, *AH* leaves the field to the snob-chic of *The Comics Journal*, the fanboy party line of *The Comic Buyers Guide* and the absolutely wretched investor pandering of *Wizard*. This bothers me. In the past, we really needed a magazine that loved comics, but with its sense of reality intact. We needed an outlet that could potentially introduce readers to Joe Matt and Dan Clowes without insulting them for not knowing about them before. We needed a title unafraid to recount the story of Ty Templeton, the cat, and the jar of yogurt (or, for that matter, unafraid to offer a used tube of paint as a prize in a contest). We needed a book that was able to do serious reporting with a wry smile.

We still do need it. But *Amazing Heroes* is no longer going to be there to assuage that need. And that's sad.

THOMAS DEJA's

short reviews began appearing in Amazing Heroes *with issue #198. His fans (both of them) can continue to follow his view on comics in* The Scream Factory's *new column, "Deja's Domicile of Dread."*

Dear Tom,

It has been a great pleasure to write reviews for *AH* over the last few years. Of all the magazines about comics that have come and gone, *Amazing Heroes* has been my constant favorite, even long before I began writing for it.

AH has been a voice for what I call the "intelligent middle." It has not (mostly) pandered to faddish tastes and trends in the industry. It has not taken an arrogant, belligerent posture as its sister magazine has done, It has consistently provided us with news, thought, and information about what is good in both the "mainstream" of comics culture as well as what might be dubbed "alternative" or "small press" comics. *AH*'s only real failing has been abominable proofreading, which in and of itself has become a kind of endearing trademark.

It appears that *AH* had been bumped out of the market by the increasing commercialization and "product-ization" of comics. As kids and adults become more and more obsessed with collectibility, multiple covers, holograms, and vigilantes, slick garbagey magazines/price guides/hype rags have devoured *AH*'s share of the market. This is a sad reflection on the status of our hobby today. We *need* a publication like *AH*, a voice of sanity in a world of screeds on one end and a world of mind-numbing speculation on the other. I hope the *AH*'s absence is only temporary.

Thanks again for over a decade of good reading.

TK Dean

Reviewer for Amazing Heroes, *Assistant Professor of English*

Dear Tom,

It's with no small amount of sadness that I heard the news of *AH*'s untimely demise. For not only was my first professional print work sold to *AH* (#5 "Ditko Days"), but I served (briefly) as one of *AH*'s "editors-of-the-week" (Between the now-missing Steve Ringgenberg and Malibu's head honcho, Dave Olbrich). Back when Fantagraphics

TRIBUTES

was located on this coast, and was only a half hour away, I stopped by often, picking up the odd assignment, and having the "honor" of being harangued by Kim and Gary.

When Fantagraphics abandoned Stamford for the west coast it only served to support my personal theory that the folks who moved from the East Coast to California raised the IQ of both places. (Just Kidding—NOT!)

Finally, I can't let this moment pass without putting in print something that I have repeated often over the years. Given Gary's reputation as the industry's resident malcontent, rabblerouser, and sometime muckraker, I have often been asked why I continued to work for him (my most recently published Fantagraphics article having appeared in *AH* #197—"Marvel Action Figures"). In response I always said this: in the decade-and-a-half I've been a professional writer Gary has been one of the precious few publishers that has not only constantly hired me, but he (or his editors) have assigned me work, bought my unsolicited articles, and paid me on time with checks that don't bounce!

I will miss *AH*. It started me off on a long and respectable writing career that opened many doors for me (both within and outside of the comics field). Though I didn't contribute to *AH* as often as I always wanted to, I always thought of it as my home base of operations. So long ol' buddy, I'm really gonna miss you.

ROBERT J. SODARO
Writer

Dear Kim and Company:

Even though I have not worked with you for some time now, I always enjoyed seeing the new issues as they came out. *Amazing Heroes* has been informative and entertaining, and I'll be sure to keep all my copies as part of my collection.

All the best, always.

JANET HETHERINGTON
AH Preview Special reporter

Dear Thomas:

It is with a lot of sadness that I learned today that *Amazing Heroes* would soon be ending its run.

Amazing Heroes will always hold a very special place in my memory. The first article I ever wrote for the magazine, a Hero History of the Phantom Stranger, appeared in issue #41. (The very first preview of Frank Miller's *The Dark Knight Returns* also appeared in that issue almost a year before it saw print.) What made it so special was the fact that it hit the comics stores the day my son, Peter, was born on April 12, 1985. A full day of joy all the way around.

Over the next 5 years I contributed frequently numerous articles to the book. I especially got a kick working on the "Preview Issue" every six months because I always reveled in the fact that I know upcoming tidbits about my favorite books long before anyone else. I would like to thank former editors, Mark Waid, Kevin Dooley and especially Kim Thompson for all their help and encouragement.

My workload has kept me from contributing for awhile, but I still read and enjoy *AH* regularly. The comics world will have less center to it without *Amazing Heroes*. I hope it returns soon.

ED SAMPLE
Former Contributor of Hero Histories, Previews, Reviews, & Features. Currently co-owner of a Financial Services company, and a proud father of two children, Peter and Patty

Dear Guys:

Even though you notified me of *Amazing Heroes*' pending cancellation over a month ago, the overwhelming feeling I get as I type this short note is one of shock. Even before I began working for you, I felt that *AH* was unique among fan press magazines in a way that really made it the best of its kind to be found any where. . .and as such, I thought it would live forever. I still can't imagine a month without an issue of it to help fill me in on what's going on in the industry, and what other fans think of it. This magazine's loss is going to cause a big hole in my life, and I'm not saying that just to be nice.

I enjoyed this magazine while it lived. . .before I began writing for it, and afterwards, and continued to do so even after I quit working for it. I will always be grateful to *AH* for giving me my start as a professional writer. . .and lament the fact that I won't get to experience it from the other end, having someone from the magazine interview me when I break into writing comics professionally someday.

I'll miss this magazine. To say anymore would be redundant. But I will add this: when you look back at this venture, feel no regrets or shame. Let *AH* go out as proudly as it started. . .and take pride in its achievements. It, and you, deserve no less.

DAVID PEATTIE
Former reviewer, previewer for the AH Preview Special, *and feature article writer currently working on a number of things to submit to DC and Marvel.*

No doubt future generations will look at the cancellation of *Amazing Heroes* and think: Wha—?

This is because fashions in comic books, like everything else, change radically from time to time, just as sure as the Toonerville Trolley became a bus.

I guess the title, *Amazing Heroes* was a liability around the Fantagraphics of the past couple of years, even though *Amazing Heroes* was more than just guys in tights. It's a funny business.

I'm grateful to Thomas Harrington for the roundabout way he helped my book, *Collier's*.

A distributor, in its catalog, had listed *Collier's* in such a weird way that it was impossible for anyone to realize it was a comic book, let alone order it! I would've never known about this, but eagle-eyed Harrington noticed and called me up about it! I happened to go on a cross-country car trip that summer, and was able to stop in at the distributor and sort it out. . . The end result was that the distributor made up for the mistake many times over, and helped transform *Collier's* from a "one-shot" to what it is today: a *series* of sporadic one-shots!

DAVID COLLIER
Cartoonist, contributor to AH *#193*

Amazing Heroes: Some Closing Thoughts

I had read only one issue of *Amazing Heroes* before joining its review staff in 1990: as a full-time financial analyst and part-time freelance writer I barely had time to read a handful of comics each month, never mind a "satellite publication" like *AH*.

Reviewing for *Amazing Heroes* made me find the time to explore comics I normally avoided (*Tapping the Vein*, *Doom Patrol*, and others) while also giving me the chance to proselytize on behalf of the reprints of such classic series as *The Spirit*, *Krazy Kat*, and *Li'l Abner*. Once I began writing for *Amazing Heroes* I started reading it regularly, too. I found the magazine by turns informative, funny, even charming.

I'll miss that charm, news, and humor now that *AH* is on hiatus.

BRUCE CANWELL
AH *review staff, 1990-92. Still a financial analyst by day and a freelance writer by night.*

Dear Tom:

Enclosed is my commentary on the cancellation of *Amazing Heroes*. The cartoon is drawn by Matt Wagner, lettering by Monty Sheldon.

I'm currently editing some cool comics at Dark Horse, such as Eddie Campbell's *Deadface*, Nina Paley's *Nina's All-Time Greatest Collector's Item Classic Comics*, Doug Wildey's *Rio at Bay*, and Matt Wagner's *Grendel: War Child*, among others. My connection to *Amazing Heroes* goes back to 1984 when Kim Thompson sweet-talked me into writing more previews than I knew what was good for me (for the '85 Preview Special). And my name is. . .

DIANA SCHUTZ

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Thank you for the chance to say "good-bye" to *Amazing Heroes* (although I have no doubt that, once you've gone through the replies to issue #200's "Reader's Poll" that it will return).

In its not-quite-12 years of life, we readers have been entertained by the likes of the character histories, the "Ten of a Kind" lists, "Cartoon Corner," "Backstage," and the Don Rosa features "Cover Gallery" and "Information Center" (to name but a few).

Along with all of your regulars, we've been treated to . . .

. . .the annual swimsuit issues.

. . .special issues devoted to: Jack Kirby(#100), Batman's 50th Anniversary (#167), Manga (#118) and European Comics (#52) that have found their way to our shores, a comprehenive guide to the events of *Crisis On Infinite Earths* (#91), 3-D Comics (#158), and so many more that it's hard to know where to stop!

. .indexes (which were noticably absent towards the end). But when they *where* appearing, we saw: Marvel Comics reprints, Red Kryptonite Stories, the Legion of Super-Heroes membership rolls, super-groups, and Earth-I's International heroes, to mention some favorites.

. . .original comic strips, such as "The Collectors," "The Pink Protector," and (of course!) "The Cartoonist" and reprints of runs of the syndicated *Star Wars* and *Star Hawks* strips.

It's been fun, peole, and I'm looking forward to more of the same when the mag makes its comeback.

PAUL E. KUSNERIK

Writer of "The (Possible) Alternate Faces of Archie Andrews" (issue #148). Works-in-progress: "From Christmas Stockings To Summer Fun" (an overview of the Archie Giant Series Magazine; "Super-Hero Amnesiacs".

Dear Final *AH* Issue,

Time to bow out, huh? Well, I'm amazed you guys lasted as long as you did! I couldn't see much purpose in your existence for the first couple of years, but you made me a believer eventually.

I'll miss the interviews—not necessarily for their quality (any interview's success is dependent on the intelligence/insights of both the subject and the questioner. The chances of these two people both having a high degree of such mental attributes at the same time is not common)—no, I'll miss them for their timeliness. If there was a new talent in the field, or a veteran making a return from a hiatus, then we could count on *AH* to jump into their studios and get the goods.

The most important comment I'd like to make concerns the *AH Preview Specials*. Since I was one of those numerous (thousands?) of small publishers who was covered in it and who gave out information on projects that were in the works and were due out INEVITABLY—I just want to tell the readers that I wasn't pulling their chains maliciously. The damn ideas WERE in the works. Try publishing for yourself sometime and see how projects get started but never get off the ground. (They don't crash; it's just that the ground crew didn't put air in the wheels.) On second thought, don't try publishing! No one wants you! I don't! I've got enough competition.

P.S. Special Studio has published 14 comics over the last 2 years. We're still in operation—but in a "reduced capacity," as they say.

DAVE DARRIGO

Publisher of Special Studios covered in Preview Specials and Interviewer of Norm Breyfogle in AH *#174.*

Auf Wiedersehen, *AH*!

I received news today that *Amazing Heroes'* final issue will conclude "eleven years and one month of comic book news, reviews, interviews, histories, essays, what have you."

What have you. That would have to include the fun, humor, trivia, entertaiment . . .and the chances the magazine has always been willing to take on unknown writers.

In 1988, I sent out my first query letter to Kevin Dooley at *Amazing Heroes*. I did it strictly to gain experience; I knew that no one ever sells an article on the first try. So I was flabbergasted when Mr. Dooley actually *bought* the article. As a die-hard fan of *Amazing Heroes* and the entire comic book business in general, I was flattered, awed and a bit horrified to see my work printed side-by-side with the work of writers who had earned my deepest respect over the years.

So, what are my thoughts on *Amazing Heroes*? Above and beyond the fun and information the magazine has continued to provide to all of its readers. *Amazing Heroes* has given me so much more on a personal level. By taking a risk on my first article, it gave me the confidence and experience necessary to jump-start my writing career. It vindicated my life's ambition of being a Writer by proving that someone (besides my relatives, that is) actually wanted to read my work.

Here's to *Amazing Heroes*. Good-bye, and thanks for everything.

A.J. LEE

(Still writing . . .novel in progress, short stories in circulation, occasional articles in print. Check back in five years.)

Hail and Farewell

What can I say about a magazine with which I've been associated for five years? Well, what have I said over and again throughout that time!

"@ #%@*!! Where's my check?!?"

Seriously, I've always enjoyed *AH*. Two of my great pleasures are eating and reading, and, oh, what bliss to combine the two! I hope you'll take it as a compliment, folks, when I say that my copies of *AH* are more grease-stained than any other books around the place.

Oh, someimes I quarrelled with the mag, usually whenever I had to turn the thing sideways to read long, incoherent interviews with modern "geniuses" of the art. The last couple of years there was more of that kind of thing than I like to see.

But whenever Dooley or McCubbin or Harrington rolled out the Hero Histories, the Ten of a Kinds, the Perspectives and those Silly Covers, man, I was walkin' in tall cotton! And I walked that way a lot.

I'm most grateful, however, for the chance to have been part of it all, to add my own shriveled newt's eyes to the magic brew. In particular, I'm thankful to God and to the Editors for allowing me to express my Christian convictions in my articles and reviews. Other guys *talk* about pluralism. You guys live it.

I've much more to say, a veritable Greer Garson goodbye. But space is short. So I'll just say thanks, people, and, like the Lord I serve, may you rise again.

GARY D. ROBINSON

A Christian minister, writer, and comics fan, continues his work with Indian Run Christian Church, E. Canton, Ohio. A reprint of his fanzine series "Great Moments in Super-History" now appears in The Comic Book Marketplace.

Goodbye, Old Friend

I've been fired three times as a Fantagraphics' columnist (twice from *Amazing Heroes*) and I fully hope I'll have several more opportunities to be fired by Fantagraphics in the future. However, I regret that I won't have the chance to be fired from *AH* again.

In the late '60s and early '70s, there were a ton of fanzines filled with amateur comic book stories, interviews with comics professionals, articles on old comic books and a hodge podge of news items and rumors. By the '80s, most of these 'zines that had been so vital to young fandom had disappeared and *Amazing Heroes* filled the void. *AH* captured the earth-shattering thrill a twelve-year-old gets when he first discovers super-hero comics. Some of us older fans still have that twelve-year-old lurking inside of us and it was nurtured by all those hero histories and indexes and previews and interviews and more that *AH* provived.

The Comics Journal was the dark, critical, evil stepsister of Fantagraphics and *Amazing Heroes* was the light, nostalgic, optimistic Cinderella who, unlike her mean sibling, seemed to genuinely *like* comic books. Real comic books with real heroes and real fun.

Now that comic books have turned so dark perhaps there is no longer room for an *Amazing Heroes* which always looked at the bright side. When the true heroes return, then maybe so will *Amazing Heroes*.

JIM KORKIS

Besides writing several articles for Amazing Heroes, *Jim also wrote a comics trivia column called "Potpourri" (illustrated by Don Rosa) and an animation column with John Cawley entitled "Cartoon Corner". Jim has written several animation books and genuinely likes comic books.*

What's left Today? *The Comics Journal* has deserted mainstream comics (in the best interests of the magazine and we readers); *The Buyer's Guide* is the thinner, blander *Comics Buyer's Guide*; *The Comic Reader*, *Comics Feature* and *RBCC* are long dead; *Comics Scene* died but came back to life minus its critical faculties.

And then there's *Amazing Heroes*—the *same Amazing Heroes*—whose news coumns and hero histories remind us, thank God, that comics *used* to be something you collected because you *liked* them.

Fanzines have changed. They remain a meeting place for fans to share common interests, but now the common interest is *money*. Today's fanzine is a price guide with a preface. The accent has switched from sentimental to resale value. It's what the market *says* your comics are worth, not what are they worth to you.

Now the news is that *Amazing Heroes* is going, probably gone. And as sad as it is to see it go, it's better than the alternative.

Better to see *Amazing Heroes* die than to see the hero histories replaced with a price guide—to see the critical reviews exchanged for more previews of yet more product, or to see the opinion columns give way to marketing reports.

Better, in short, to have had *Amazing Heroes* and lost it than to never have had it at all.

TOM FIELD

was an 18-year-old letter hack in 1981, when he bought Amazing Heroes *#1 at a comic book store in Boston. He now is managing editor of the Portsmouth, N.H.* Press, *and his freelance credits include articles for* CBG *and* Amazing Heroes, *plus obscure stories for Eclipse and Marvel Comics.*

What *Amazing Heroes* Meant To Me.

"Amazing Readers", the lettercol and literary soapbox of *AH* was the meeting place of comicdom. Writers, artists, readers and even the lucky few who'd graduutated from consuming comics into producing them. It was in the "Amazing Readers" column that I first spoke up to defend myself and my article, it was fun.

More importantly *AH* allowed us to take our views of comicdom to the public. Comics' lettercols are, for the most part, "Rah-Rah" sessions. Only a few negative letters are ever published, and never the ones which challenge the very premise of a character or story. *Amazing Heroes* pulled no punches, ever, for which I thank them. Not even with me.

Kevin, and later his successor, Thomas Harrington worked with me as they did with any writer; issuing review assignments, accepting some freelance articles I wrote, rejecting others I submitted. Sometimes I tried to sell the rejects to other magazines. But I almost always found that *AH* editorial judgement was shared by their competitors. A true sign of quality, I realized.

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I can only hope that the death of *Amazing Heroes* will be akin to the death of *Star Trek*, and that the resurrection will be all but inevitable.

I will miss this magazine. It got me started as a serious writer, spurred me to get to two conventions in San Diego, and helped me to meet a lot of good people. I offer my sympathy to the *AH* staff, and my heartfelt thanks for a great publication. Good luck to you all in the future.

LAWRENCE H. BURDICK

An active freelance writer, Mr. Burdick wrote his first AH *piece in 1987. He is hard at work on his first novel.*

I'm sorry to see *Amazing Heroes* go. It's probably my favorite fanzine. I read each issue from cover to cover. There is a genuine sense of fun to *AH* which really comes through in the writing. I like the fact that *AH* never takes comics very seriously, and can usually get in some good cracks on bad comics (especially in your "Coming Distractions" feature).

I never wrote much for *AH* over the years—I just contributed to the annual preview issue a couple of times. As much as a pain in the neck those issues were, I will still miss them. I think they made for great reading. They were just chock full of information!

P.S. Sidney Mellon was the *best*! I used to work with Sidney on the short-lived *Comics Week* magazine. I was there when the kid got his start in the biz. He was possessed of a rare insight about comics that far exceeded his years. I am confident that he will be back! You can't keep a good Mellon down!

BARRY DUTTER

Currently working on a Punisher *bookshelf series, a* Nick Fury *one-shot, the "Spider-Ham" feature in* What The—, *back-ups for* Marvel Comics Presents, *and a* Hawkeye *limited series. His career goal is to someday write more comics than Fabian Nicieza.*

Dear Amazing,

Sometimes it is good to fall back, regroup, and try again. The industry has gone through many changes since you started in 1981. Many talented, hard-working folks were a part of those 11 years. We on your comp list have been grateful for the opportunity to keep current and enjoy your efforts.

Perhaps soon you will redesign it and come out with something we just cannot be without! I'll hold that thought. Take good care of yourselves.

SHEL DORF

Writer-interviewer—lettering man

Tom,

SAY IT AIN'T SO!!!!!!!

I've been reading *Amazing Heroes* virtually from its inception and have always enjoyed its insightful interviews, previews, reviews and what have you.

Of the many publications for which I have written, *AH* was always my favorite (my love of comics supersedes that for movies, television, science-fiction/fantasy/horror books and so forth).

In the six years I've been associated with *AH*, I've had the pleasure of doing a good number of those reviews, previews, interviews and what have you. I'll miss being able to contribute to the magazine.

There are other publications out there covering the comics beat, but none had the ambience of *AH*—Hell! *AH* was purely fun for the comics fan.

I hope that *AH* will be resurrected someday, but for now all I can say is (. . .at this point the writer, overcome with emotion, hit the wrong button on his computer, losing forever whatever tribute he might have been about to utter. . .)

WWWAAAAAAAAAHHHHHHHHHHH!!!!!!!!!

SHELDON WIEBE

Reviewer

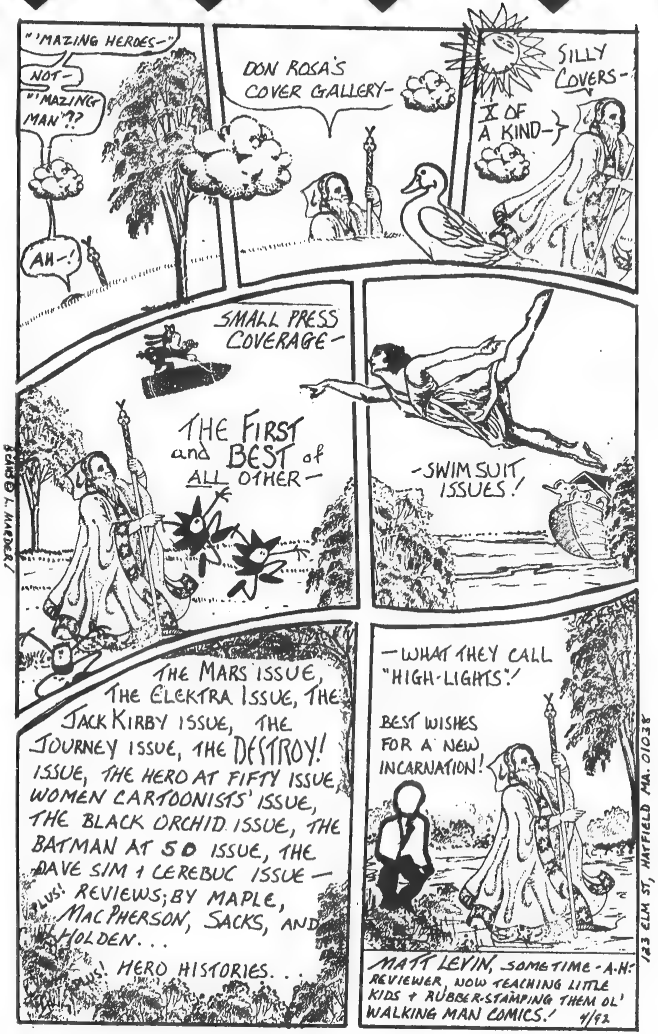
Dear Tom:

Here are my thoughts on *Amazing Heroes* which you've asked for:

Yarst and pfui! I know that all good things must come to an end, but why does it have to be *Amazing Heroes*? I've been enjoying it for the past decade; I think that the first issue I saw was #7 or 8, and I've been reading it regularly ever since. It's been annoyingly late on occasions, but its articles and features have been so informative and well-written that this hasn't been a serious problem. My back issues have been valuable reference tools on several occasions when I've been writing articles about the comics field. (Too bad it hasn't been better-indexed, though. It can be murder trying to track down something you dimly remember having read about two years ago.) The comics field needs a good newspaper, a good newsmagazine, and a good critical review journal. It's had the newspaper with the *Comic Buyer's Guide*, the newsmagazine with *Amazing Heroes*, and the review journal with *The Comics Journal*. The disappearance of *Amazing Heroes* will leave a serious gap. I hope that somebody else can start a new newsmagazine to fill this gap, but I'm pessimistic. It'll have to be really good to replace *Amazing Heroes*.

FRED PATTEN

Author of "Dozens of Dragons", an extensive annotated bibliography of dragon fantasy fiction for the new magazine Zoomorphica *(first issue due out this Summer). Currently preparing the 15th-anniversary celebration meeting of the Cartoon/Fantasy Organization, the major Los Angeles-area Japanimation fan club and the oldest Japanimation fan club in America.*


"'MAZING HEROES—"
NOT— "'MAZING MAN"??
AH—!
DON ROSA'S COVER GALLERY—
SILLY COVERS—
1 OF A KIND—
SMALL PRESS COVERAGE—
THE FIRST and BEST of ALL OTHER—
—SWIM SUIT ISSUES!
THE MARS ISSUE, THE ELEKTRA ISSUE, THE JACK KIRBY ISSUE, THE JOURNEY ISSUE, THE DESTROY! ISSUE, THE HERO AT FIFTY ISSUE, WOMEN CARTOONISTS' ISSUE, THE BLACK ORCHID ISSUE, THE BATMAN AT 50 ISSUE, THE DAVE SIM & CEREBUS ISSUE— PLUS: REVIEWS; BY MAPLE, MACPHERSON, SACKS, AND HOLDEN. . .
PLUS: HERO HISTORIES. . .
—WHAT THEY CALL "HIGH-LIGHTS"!
BEST WISHES FOR A NEW INCARNATION!
MATT LEVIN, SOMETIME-A.H. REVIEWER, NOW TEACHING LITTLE KIDS & RUBBER-STAMPING THEM OL' WALKING MAN COMICS! 4/92
123 ELM ST, HAYFIELD MA. 01038

TRIBUTES

Dear Mr. Harrington,

It is indeed an end of an era with the publication of the last issue of *Amazing Heroes*. *Amazing Heroes* was much more than a magazine that reported the ups and downs of the comics industry: it was a part of the heart and soul of comic fans and fandom.

Much more than just a monthly magazine filled with coming events, interviews and reviews, *Amazing Heroes* read like a Who's Who of professionals and fans moving up to the professional ranks. The names of the contributing writers, artists, and editors to grace these pages over the past 203 issues are names that will be long remembered in comics fandom.

I'm just thankful that in some small way, I was able to contribute to the pages of *Amazing Heroes*.

CHARLES S. NOVINSKIE
Feature writer

Amazing Heroes, in my biased opinion, was the best fan-mag of the '80s. It was a friendly old bar you could stop into whenever you wanted, trade a few stories—maybe even a hero history— and go home from, feeling happier. Ouside of Kim and Gary, I've probably been around longer than any of the others involved with it. I wrote more Hero Histories than any body else (who else would wanna?) and did a few assorted other things here and there, most notably the Golden Age Directory starting in ish #63. This was to have been reprised by a Silver Age Directory. . . but then the axe fell. Some idiot turned out the lights.

They're tearing down Kim Thompson's bar.

I've got a lot of good memories stored up around *AH*. Such as sending Stephen King a copy of my Warren article, and getting back a postcard saying he liked it. Such as meeting R.A. Jones and Mark Waid, my fellow Southwestern scribes. Such as all the editors I've had a chance to be associated with, from Kim through the final one, Tom Harrington. I've got on fine with all of them, but my favorite? Dave Olbrich, take a bow.

So now, it's ALL history. But it was fun, rehashing the whys and wherefores of the Warrens, Shang-Chi, Thor, Captain Marvel, Sgt. Fury, Nick Fury/SHIELD, the New Gods, Dr. Doom, Captain America, the Silver Surfer, Batman, Dracula, Conan, and Iron Man. And you ought to see all the ones we had planned before we were so. . . RUDELY interrupted!

The old bar's closing down. Maybe not forever, though. Glad to have been one of the regulars. *Really* glad.

LOU MOUGIN
Wrote a batch of Hero Histories and other things for Amazing Heroes *over the last ten years and is writing the* Sparkplug *mini-series from Hero Comics, due out in August, which he fervently hopes you all will buy.*

What *Amazing Heroes* Meant to Me

What can I say about *Amazing Heroes*? I was always proud to be part of this magazine, first as Assistant Editor, and later as a review columnist.

When I was hired in 1989 to be Assistant Editor of *Amazing Heroes*, I was somewhat naive. I believed the fancy (to me) title could lead me to. . . some job in the comics field. What sort of job, I had no idea, but the principle was what was important to me.

Except for the paychecks, being an editor at *Amazing Heroes* was the best job I've ever had. I got to read and write about comics all day. The hours were casual, the dress was casual, the music around was terrific, I got invited to parties with famous cartoonists like Pete—he let me call him Pete—Bagge and Jim Woodring. Except for the money, it seemed to be the ideal job.

After awhile the job got routine, as all jobs do. I realized that I was just a glorified typist. And it was harder every month to pay my rent and bills. It was a relief in a way when my "glamorous" job ended.

Since my time on the editorial staff on the magazine ended, I've worked freelance as a reviewer. In issue 201 my interview with Dave Sim made the cover. I felt like a real professional writer.

Now *AH* is ending. I'll miss it. The magazine meant a lot to me for awhile, and now a small part of my past is gone. Bye, *Amazing Heroes*!

JASON SACKS
Former Assistant Editor and review columnist. Now I work as a medical records clerk (just like Harvey Pekar)

During the days when I was regularly buying comics, *Amazing Heroes* was always the first item I'd read. I'd pass over *Watchmen*, I'd put off *Zot!*, and I'd even select it over *Concrete*. . . and everything else. I'd read those later.

Much as I enjoyed the actual comics I'd buy, I've always preferred to read *AH* first. It isn't that I enjoy it more than the comics I buy. . . it's a reminder of why most of us are reading comics in the first place.

As I've gotten older, my interests have varied, and most of the comics I once read don't seem to have kept pace with them. But I haven't abandoned comics, and I don't think I ever could. And even when I've been distinterested in most of the material available, I've always had *AH* to rely on.

I started reading comics several years after the era of the self-published fanzines that came from the earliest days of organized fandom. I was too late to have enjoyed them first hand, but I'd like to believe that *AH* has always carried on that spirit.

These days, reading comics seems to involve as much financial speculation as four-color enjoyment. . . if not more. The publications that will succeed *AH* seem primarily concerned with what title will be a worthwhile investment, what artist might make a title a worthwhile investment, or what character might make a title a worthwhile investment. . . or any combination thereof.

To each his own. If this is how you enjoy comics, by all means continue to enjoy them. And have fun with them. For me, when *AH* is gone, that sense of fun is what I'll miss the most.

BRIAN PEARCE
Former AH *cartoonist, now an Assistant Art Director at DC Comics.*

Dear Tom:

I was introduced to *Amazing Heroes* by Richard Howell. It was *AH* that not only gave me the opportunity to voice my opinions about the situation at Archie Comics via my review of *Veronica* #1 published in *AH* #162 (April 1989), but actually *paid* me for it! (I wasn't expecting that!) Chris McCubbin bought another review I wrote of *Betty and Veronica* #20 and asked me to become a regular reviewer. It was quite a privilege to be able to share my opinions of volumes like James Van Hise's *How To Draw Art for Comic Books* and Anton Drek's (aka Don Simpson) *Wendy Whitebread—Undercover Slut* classic. And it has been fun!

Tom Harrington edited my article about *Superman, Action, and John F. Kennedy*. That article helped establish my reputation as a serious comics historian.

I did a drawing for the *Amazing Heroes Swimsuit Special* a couple of years ago. Unfortunately, it couldn't be considered. Kim Thompson told me about the infamous Archie lawyers' letter complaining about Betty topless in the previous Swimsuit Issue and refusing to allow the Archie characters to be used again.

I wish you, Tom, and everyone connected with *Amazing Heroes* all the best in the future. Hopefully, that future will include more issues of *Amazing Heroes*.

MARY SMITH
Former AH *Reviewer. Current publisher of* The Archie Fan Magazine.

To everyone at *Amazing Heroes*, past & present:

The demise of such a fine publication may not seem like time for a celebration. But despite the genuine negative emotions this situation engenders in us, I think it *is* time to celebrate the accomplishments of the past that we have collectively produced and the hopes of that we have for the future so.

Congratulations and Best Wishes!!

JIM BURKE
a.k.a. T.M. Maple

I guess I've always felt that the name was all wrong, it sounds like a low-grade comic book when it was supposed to be an upgrade journal about comics. I also thought it had its share of bad art and bad layouts. Since I've long felt that Fantagraphics can do no wrong, *Amazing Heroes* surprised me since it just seemed all wrong. However that didn't stop me from writing for it even if it didn't pay enough to keep my cat supplied with litter. Nor did it dissuade me from writing for comics, which paid better and kept my cat supplied with litter longer.

JR COCHRAN
*Ex-*AH *reviewer*

Boy—I'm going to miss my friend.

See, there was *Comics Review*, which struck me as the equivalent of writing a master's thesis on John Lennon's changing hairlength as a function of his politicization—in other words, overanalysis overlooking the magic. Then there was *The Comic Buyers Guide*, which also wasn't for me: I'm not a speculator in a product but a Reader, a Lover, of comics. But it was okay that neither appealed to me, because I had my friend, *Amazing* you-know-who.

Now that the fun is over, I'm doubly thrilled to have sold *AH* an aricle (10-of-a-Kind on Kryptonite) as well as had a judiciously pared-down letter (a rant, to be honest) printed in "Amazing Readers."

As a DC fan, particularly of the "real" Superman of the '50s-'70s, I submitted other articles which, though not printed, netted me the nicest rejection letters I've ever received.

But now where will I turn for my education, entertainment, and all that *AH* means to me? Now Don Rosa will never feature Superman titles with wrestling rings in his Cover Gallery! I can't submit my villain history of the Silver Age Lex Luthor! Andy Mangels can't print a *Fish Police* episode guide!

I'm going to have to buck up and face the facts: somewhere an accountant said "Kimota" to my favorite comics magazine and now something wild, weird, and wonderful is gone. At least I have a full drawer in my file cabinet to prove it wasn't all a glorious Red-Kryptonite-induced dream.

Thanks for the fun. So long, friend.

MARK ALFRED
Author of a "'X-of-a-Kind" article on Kryptonite printed in AH *#193, lives in Oklahoma City with his long-suffering wife and three children who have been thoroughly Super-Bat-indoctrinated. He's had five articles printed in the* Best of Trek *paperback anthology series.*

Amazing People. . .

I had just staggered home from an afternoon of beer guzzling at a new bar called—"Muggs 'n' Juggs" (. . . an odd place to find this queer one. . .) . . . my mailbox was filled to the brim with junk mail, bills, letters from prison inmates and a curious envelope from the folks at *Amazing Heroes*. The letter stated that with issue #204 *Amazing*

Heroes was to be no more (quoth the Raven). How sad, how very, very sad. I love *Amazing Heroes* so very much and I looked forward to each and every new issue. *AH* was the perfect middle ground betweeen the "hard news" of the *CBG* and the "biting commentary" of *The Comics Journal*. There was enough news, comic info and gossip to please any comic fan, plus a touch of satire and humor to satisfy the lunatics like me... Hell/Heck, I owe a good chunk of my "Letterhack Career" to the pages of "Amazing Readers!" I began my sojourn into Letterhackdom in the pages of DC's *Wasteland*, but I truly thrived (and festered) in *AH*'s letters column. In fact without *Amazing Heroes* my doctor would not have cut back my Zanex prescription, would not have lessened my voltage of electro-shock therapy and I subsequently would not have been able to teach my monkeys how to Tango...(and I never would have worn my tutu and tiara to the mall) To you guys I own a debt of gratitude. You have all become a part of me and my extended family. I was *so* thrilled when I met Kim Thompson at the San Diego Comic Convention in 1990! Here was a guy who played such an important part in putting together my very favortie comic magazine! As I leaned over to kiss him hello—he quickly turned away calling me "Rainman." He turned up his nose as if I were a peddler selling my bowel movements at the County Fair. But, I didn't mind—I knew this was Kim's way of telling me I'm a kindred spirit in this world of Love 'n' Death. Yeah, I know I'm sometimes hard to take and difficult to pigeonhole. I'm a little bit country and a little bit Rock 'n' Roll. Maybe that's why *Amazing Heroes* is so dear to me and I will surely miss it. So in the immortal words of my favorite murderer Ed Gein—"Let 'em eat Kate!"

LON WOLF
Letterhack

I have the dubious pleasure of being the very last employee of the comics newsmagazine of the '80s *Amazing Heroes*.

My beginings with the mag were somewhat strange: I'm sitting at home one evening and the phone rings around 10:30. It's my wife's friend Shanna, who works in circulation at Fantagraphics, and she says "How'd you like a job?" I quipped, "Sure, for $10 an hour," and hung up. A day or two later after having my wife explain just exactly how big an idiot I am for not even really finding out what was being offered, I set up an interview with Kim Thompson. The day arrived and I showed up at a slightly dubious blue house in my nice suit and was promptly told that Kim was sick and nobody had ever heard of me. Alas. With perserverance I came in again and actually was interviewed. Me once again in my suit, and Kim Thompson in a T-shirt and sweats (that I was soon to learn was his own personal dress code) and the job was mine. What followed was youthful fantasies of a great career in comics and fame & fortune. What I got, however, was one hell of a lot of typing.

Overall, though I have enjoyed my time with *Amazing Heroes*, and have appreciated Tom Harrington for giving me the opportunity to do reviews for the book and asking my opinion on some things he wanted to do with the mag. Being the token mainstream comics fan I will probably miss *Amazing Heroes* more than anyone else around here except Tom. It's just a damn shame there is *still* so much life in it and so much that could be done.

It is kind of fitting though, here I am the last employee of *Amazing Heroes* typing up the last piece completed for the last issue. Good-bye, *Amazing Heroes*, come back soon.

ANDREW HERINGTON
Typesetter, Reviewer, Coming Distractions Writer and all around general Amazing Heroes *flunkie 1991-92.*

INFERNAL GALL

by Adam-Troy Castro

SHOULD AULD ACQUAINTANCE BE FERCRIMPT

Hi there.

As I'm sure you've already read six or seven times by now, this, here, what you got in your sweaty hands now, is the very last issue of *Amazing Heroes*.

I'm as broken up by this as you are. No kidding; I've come to love this little rag over the past few years, and I'm going to miss a lot more than just the monthly paycheck (which always came in handy whenever somebody needed change for a ten). I'm gonna miss Andy Mangels' breezy entertainment reportage, and Tom Harrington's witty editorials, and Don Rosa's charming cover galleries, and the hilarious slugfests between Teri Wood and Dave Stroń (who were both equally funny when they each stayed on their own turf and kept their hands to themselves). I'm gonna miss working with Chas Gillen, who just started illustrating this part of the mag a couple of months ago and was terrific from day one. I'm even gonna miss the letter column, which, even though it frequently featured the same five or six names, was one of the liveliest and most amusing in the industry. I ain't gonna miss "Coming Distractions," 'cause I never read it, but then few people did, and that's water under the bridge, anyway. I'm gonna miss the whole package is what I'm saying. The newsstand's gonna be a far dimmer place without this little gem appearing there at theoretically the same time each and every month.

The news came just as I was putting last issue's Anvil-Man hero history to bed, and via more anguished whining than any editor should be expected to stomach, I managed to talk Tom into letting Chas and I do the Anvil-Man story I'd already tentatively planned to do at some point in the dim, unplanned future. You'll find the results elsewhere int this issue. But the axe still fell with such little warning that it cut off a bunch of half-formed column ideas that, unless I get rid of them here, will be rattling through my skull for all eternity. And so, before we head for the last roundup of thanks and acknowledgements and shameless self-promotion (not to mention the last repetition of "Notary Sojak!") let's exorcise those ghosts so they can shuffle off this mortal coil in peace.

For instance, I never got around to doing my special column on *John Constantine, Hellblazer*. Said column would have advanced the thesis that the book in question concerns itself not with battles between the forces of good and evil, but with the slow damnation of one flawed but fundamentally decent man constantly forced into positions of moral compromise. I was also gonna say I'm enjoying the scripts of Garth Ennis a lot more than I enjoyed those of Jamie Delano. With luck, I'll be able to get into the reasons at another time.

I'VE BEEN WAITING A BLOODY-AWFUL LONG TIME FOR A SPECIAL COLUMN OF MYSELF, AND IT'S ALL BEEN FOR NAUGHT!
I'M PISSED!
JOHN CONSTANTINE/HELLBLAZER © 1992 DC

I also never produced the frequently plugged "collaboration" between me and a famous dead author. This one was promised about a dozen times, and never appeared.

Close readers of this column should have no problem figuring out that the famous dead guy in question was my fave rave Mark Twain; the column, a parody of *Tom Sawyer* in which I drew uncanny parallels between declaring crappy comics "first issue collector's items" and tricking all the dumb kids in the neighborhood into whitewashing a fence for you, actually got written some time ago, but was never actually run because I ain't Twain, and my homage sucked fetid bilge water. But the point is still a good one. The collector's mentality is still polluting the comics marketing, and all too often is rendering questions of workmanship and quality damn near irrelevant.

Here's a recent case in point so silly it demands mention: the *Comic Book Greats* videos, which profile various artists both great and not great. One of the early subjects was Rob Liefeld, a fella with a blue jeans commercial and hysterical fan following despite an overbearing, over-rendered style based on Todd McFarlane swipes and an utter ignorance of either storytelling or the basics of human anatomy. One of the next documentaries was about Sergio Aragones, a true master of the form who has always ignored fads and demographics to let his talent take him wherever he wanted to go. Liefeld's cluttered artwork is so hard to follow it induces headaches, whereas Aragones' even more detailed work is such a miracle of compostition that he can unerringly guide your eye to a single tiny figure in the middle of a battlefield.

Early this year, the producer of the videos announced that, due to a packaging error, some of the Aragones

videos were actually Liefeld videos that had been mislabeled. To his credit, he promised to instantly replace any of the mislabeled videos with the genuine article; but since such an operation would gouge a major hole in his profits, he also understandably tried to come up with a way to make fans WANT to keep the defective merchandise. And knowing his market, he said the one thing that might actually have that effect. He said that the defective videos would probably turn out to be a major collector's item.

Now, lord knows how many simple-minded collectors out there are hoarding Mylar-bagged VHS tapes with the wrong program on them. There may not be many. But I promise you, somewhere out there in fandom land, sits at least one miserable jackass who's bought the manufacturer's ploy hook, line, and sinker: somebody who's rubbing his hands and cackling like a fanboy Renfield at the thought of getting his mitts on something so valuable. The idiot in question doesn't realize that *anybody* could manufacture such a bogus "collector's item" by simply recording a different program over the one that originally came with the tape. No. As far as he's concerned he's gonna be rich, and for his sake I hope he isn't near anything breakable when wiser souls explain reality to him.

Another oft-promised column that never got run was my piece on the four different kinds of comic book shops. this one was deep-sixed for another reason entirely: because a major reviewer at our sister magazine *The Comics Journal* had just been fired for plagiarizing vast chunks of Pauline Kael's movie reviews in his article on the Batman craze of two summers ago. [*as well as a review of* Skreemer *for* The Comics Journal—*TH*] The critic in question admitted the plagiarism, but claims that it had been done subconsciously. I for one believed him, since one of the hardest things about the writing business is telling the difference between the brilliant phrase that comes out of our own head and the one that you actually got from something else you'd read x number of years before. But when the story broke, it somehow infected me with the idea that the comics shop article was an almost verbatim transcript of a *Comics Journal* editorial I might have read sometime.

THERE'S A COLLECTOR'S ITEM IN THE MAKING HERE, AND I'M GETTING IN ON THE GROUND FLOOR!*
COMIC BOOK GREATS
PHIPPS MUSEUM OF HORROR BAGS
$55
*SEE INFERNAL GALL, AH#200

I knew it was probably just paranoia. My friends can tell you I'm prone to it. They're probably laughing about it behind my back right now. The bastards.

But for what it's worth, I separated the comic shops into four types:

1) The Pornographer: The seedy, ill-tempered guy who operates out of a dingy, ill-lit storefront with few furnishings, who sells nothing but the most popular DCs and Marvels and is obviously prepared to desert the place once the market turns bad;

2) The Toy Salesman: whose store is so filled with plush animals and board games and all other accoutrements that the comics (again, usually just the most popular DCs and Marvels) become just a mildly profitable sideline;

3) The Supermarket: The guy who sells everything, including back issues, and a fair smattering of independents, but still makes his stock decisions on commercial considerations alone and therefore avoids supporting comics as an art form.

4) The Bookstore: The guy who really seems to care about the medium and makes an honest attempt to carry as wide a selection as possible.

In my article, I made the point that while the Pornographer has the lowest overhead, the Toy Salesman the most diversified clientele, and the Supermarket the steadiest business, the Bookstore is the only place that has a future. Why? Because none of the others has any customer loyalty.

If you want to buy a copy of *Spider-Man*, you can buy it in almost any neighborhood you go, and it won't matter to you that nine months out of ten you get it at the little hole-in-the-wall store run by the seedy guy with the attitude problem, But—and this is the hardest lesson to teach folks who go onto the comics shop business—if you're a reader who wants a spottily distributed black & white title from some publisher without holograms on its covers, you'll have to make a special trip, and you'll be damn grateful to the store that carries it.

I know several folks who commute for more than an hour to stop at a certain shop that fits in the fourth category, just because they can't find what they want anywhere else, and when they get there they have to spend *big* to justify the trip. It's one of the reasons the store in question is so frequently packed. The store sells more than its fair share of super-hero stuff, but they have an additional clientele *on top of that*, and as a result they make a lot more money.

Tell that to the worst kind of comic shop owner, the guy I call the pornographer, who only cares about the bottom line, and who writes letters to industry publications swearing he can't make money selling anything but X-this, X-that, and X-the other thing. The guy who told me multiple covers was "the best thing that ever happened to the comics business." Whose stores smell of must, and who usually sits morosely behind the counter listening to the after-school crowd discussing *Armageddon: Inferno* for the fifth time that week. Who only interacts with adults (of any age) when they wander into his establishment by accident, take in the Wolverine posters and the furnishings that consist of cardboard boxes on card tables, and then exclaim, as if he wasn't sitting right there listening to them insult his livelihood, "Oh, God, I didn't know they still sold this shit!"

I don't know about you, but to me that doesn't sound like much of a life.

The final column I never got to was my piece on cultural literacy. One of the reasons folks like Neil Gaiman and (when he's not coasting) William Messner-Loebs stand out in the world of mainstream comics writers is that they clearly know about more than comic books; they know about history, and mythology, and how to use the English language, and their work has a richness that reflects this. In contrast, one of the reasons Todd McFarlane, who comes off as a nice guy in interviews, has also turned out to be such an appallingly bad writer is that he seems to have a storytelling sense derived from nothing but previous Marvel comics.

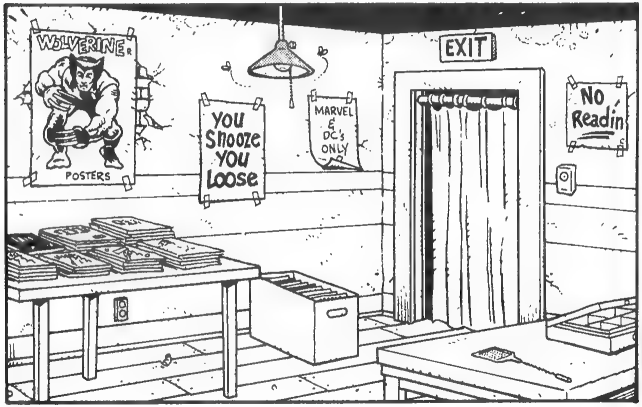
Alas, it is precisely this deficiency that makes him such a commercial artist, since—with a few bright exceptions, and you know who you are—the cultural memory of today's audience, regarding everyhing except comic books and TV shows, has shrunken to almost nothing. And what's most virulent about this tidal wave of ignorance is that most of the folks effected by it have been conditioned into being downright proud of it. McFarlane brags in interviews about never, ever reading anything other than comics. The kids who comprise the largest chunk of his audience brag about not knowing about anything that happened more than two years ago. It's all connected, and it scares the piss out of me, since aside from the small matter of what it has to say about the future of our society it also means that ten years from now the bulk of our comics, movies, TV shows, and music (let alone books, if there are any) will have to be geared to an even lower common denominator than they are today.

And in case you think I'm exaggerating, here's a recent conversation I actually had with a kid graduating high school this year:

ME: I'm going to see the movie *JFK*.
KID: Really? I saw an ad for that. What's it about?
ME: (after an incredulous pause) JFK.
KID: The airport?
ME: (cannot believe this is happening) No. It's about what happened to Kennedy.
KID: (excitedly) You mean they made a movie about the rape trial already?

The big yoks involved here are only half the story. The rest of the story is that the increasing number of folks afflicted with this kind of ignorance have become downright arrogant about it. They find it preferable to the horrible, unbearable onus of actually knowing something. So they avoid any entertainment that actually requires them to think, and they become the kind of people who can read *The Punisher* and buy that comic's implicit message that civil liberties are just an annoying loophole that prevent heroic vigilantes from blowing away the bad guys that can always be recognized on sight.

The major share of the blame goes to our educational system, of course . . . but our popular entertainment has aided and abetted the process by pitching itself lower and lower to match these increasingly decreased expectations. And if the trend is to be reversed, then the world of pop entertainment, of which comics are so miniscule a part, is going to have to do part of the work by beginning to



to demand more of the audience. If it does, then sooner or later the audiences will *have* to get smarter to keep up. And so will the comics and movies and TV shows. And the general level of historical and political awareness. It's going to be hard. But it can be done...and more importantly, it must be done.

Only a few things left to do before we board up the place. First, the very last—

Shameless Self-Promotion Department

It's one of the sad ironies of this column's demise (to me, at least) that the last installment hits the stands just as this little featurette seemed about to gain the accuracy that it previously lacked. All the stuff I plugged as imminent last year seems about to come out now. Oh, well. *Pulphouse: A Hardback Magazine* #12, containing my oft-plugged story "Metastasis," should finally be hitting the stands just about now. Check it out, since it's a goodie. Also, keep checking out *Pulphouse Monthly*, which now has about ten of my stories in inventory, and *Midnight Graffiti*, which has my tale, "Razorface Did That!", and *Iniquities*, which has a nice piece of nastiness called "The Slow Hit." And you might want to search recent issues of the genre news magazines *Locus* and *SF Chronicle* for a small but very interesting announcement regarding my previously published story "Clearance to Land."

Folks who hate acknowledgents can skip the rest of it. Special thanks to: Dwight Decker, for leaving me with some impossible shoes to fill; to ex-editor Chris McCubbin, who got me this gig and helped set its tone; to Tom Harrington, for knowing who Fred MacMurray was, and for tolerating my spasms of self-indulgence, this paragraph among them; for Mark Thompson, for coming up with appropriate illustrations, which was sometimes next to impossible; to Harvey Pekar, who might not have known that some impudent twerp was taking cheap shots at him every month, but who in his silence seemed to be taking it rather well, I thought; and my correspondents Michael Sutton and Peter Iorillo and Bob Heer and Anton Hermus/Hemus/Humus and Cynthia Fluharty and Chris Shorb and everybody else whose name escapes me at the moment. And to Roberta Gregory for the neat Bitchy-Bitch drawing and to Doug Gray for the equally neat Hercules. Thanks to the past and present members of the Thursday Night Writer's Workshop: Hy Bender, Judy Starger, Avril Hordyk, Sharon Gumerove, Elena Andrews, Lisa Nowak, Donna Ellis, Jennifer Grey (not the actress), Mitch Wagner, with special nods to Shawna McCarthy who got us started, and our dapper host D. Edward Bungert, whose thrill-packed first novel will be coming out in paperback early next year. Adam-Troy says check it out. Special thanks to Ken Houghton, to Tony Isabella for the kind words, and to neat writer Jerry Oltion for one of the great neat ego-expanding gestures of all time. To Kim Thompson and Gary Groth, for running the joint. And of course to Sidney Mellon, for showing me how not to act.

You're good guys, all of you. Thanks for making it such an interesting ride. And for the very, very last time: Notary Sojak! ●

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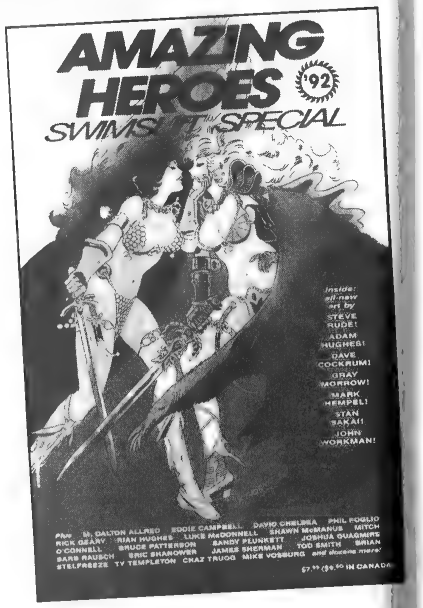
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ANDY MANGELS BACK STAGE

THE BATMAN CARTOON SHOW

It's with sadness that I begin this final "Backstage" column, and face the last issue of *Amazing Heroes*. I began writing for this magazine with issue #91, and began the "Backstage" column in #159. Now, 40 columns later and many relationships forged, I'm proud of my run with the magazine. It's been full of exclusives and controversies, material to entertain and material to make you think.

Amazing Heroes has led me to work for almost every major comic book company: Marvel, DC, Innovation, Tundra, Fantagraphics, Eclipse, Rip-Off Press, Blackthorne, and almost-projects with First, New, and others. It has gained me work with international publishers in England and Italy, and garned fans in Germany, Brazil, Japan, and other countries.

Amazing Heroes gave me a forum to address a major issue of importance to me and to others: Gays in Comics (#143-144). My editors supported me when I came out as the *first* openly gay mainstream comic writer, and when I took political stances in my columns. Unfortunately, my openness created an issue in and of itself; in this business, it's all too easy to tell someone, "You're just not right," without telling them the reasons behind the decision.

I do have to ask why the comics industry seems to still believe that female writers can only write good female characters, African-American writers can only write good black characters, and a gay writer can only write queer stories, while straight white men can write all of the above and more. Can someone explain that logic to me?

Am I saying that homophobia *hurt* my comic writing career? Hell yes! Am I saying I regret my decision to come out? Hell *no*.

Above all, I've learned to be true to myself. *Good* editors will not allow prejudice and hatred to color their decisions.

A few issues ago, I thanked many of the people who had helped shape this column. As this issue closes, I'd like to thank a few more: Ginny Traeger (Mom^2), who helped type my very first articles when I was in college; the many sources and insiders who helped fill this column; and the fans who supported "Backstage" through thick and thin. Lastly, I wanted to thank my husband, Jim for his love and support through the last four years. This issue should be coming out just prior to our second wedding anniversary on June 16. *Happy Anniversary!*

For those who mourn the loss of "Backstage," there is good news at the column's end. For the last time in *Amazing Heroes*, I'll say, "We'll get to that in a minute, but first the news. . . ."

CBS

CBS's Saturday Morning schedule features: *Fievel's American Tails*, continuing the adventures of the Mousekewitz family in the Wild West town of Green River; *Disney's The Little Mermaid*; *Disney's Raw Toonage*, comedy shorts with Sebastian the Crab and Goofy, as well as the adventures of new toy characters Marsupilami and Bonkers, a bumbling wildcat; and Howie Mandel's *The Amazing Live Sea Monkeys*.

Fish Police goes belly-up.

If you didn't like Ramy Zada in CBS's *Vigilante*-like *Dark Justice*, he's been replaced by Bruce Abbot in the role as Judge Nicholas Marshall. Whether the quality will improve is another matter.

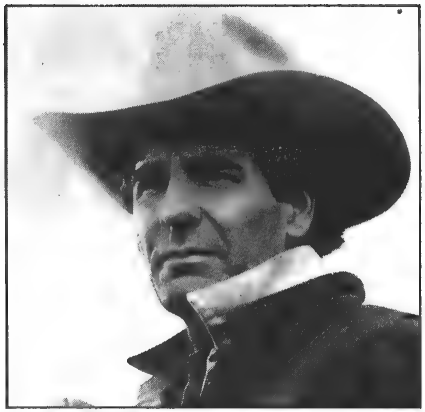
CBS doesn't seem to want to give up on the comic book concept, but this time they're going for star appeal. Bob Newhart will star this fall in *Bob*, from the award-wining producers of *Cheers*. Newhart plays a comic book artist/writer who creates a character named *Mad Dog*, a super-hero, to fulfill his fantasies. CBS won't say who's playing the super-hero, or if Bob's getting advice on writing and drawing from the Image gang. Paul Powers, a storyboarder and sometimes Innovation cartoonist, will draw the comics for the show and also appear as one of Bob's fellow cartoonists.

Fish Police has gone belly up. As of this writing, it appears CBS won't even be airing the final three episodes.

NBC

Besides *Danger Island* (the *Island of Dr. Moreau* "homage"), *Knight Rider 2010* (with a new female car), and Columbia's modern remake of *Journey to the Center of the Earth* (scripted by *Radio Flyer*'s David Mickey Evans and Robert Gunter, with toy tie-ins already set up), NBC is looking strongly at *Red Dwarf* from Universal. Some viewers might recognize the name, since it was a British TV series which lasted three seasons. The comedy found the last survivor on a huge starship being kept company by a couple of holograms and his cat, which had mutated into a humanoid being. NBC will remake the series if it is picked up. Robert Llewellyn will reprise his role as Kryten. Craig Bierko, Hinton Battle, and Chris Eigeman also star.

Fan favorite *Quantum Leap* is facing some budget cuts next season, but that doesn't mean fans will get wimpy stories. In the first two-hour episode Sam Beckett leaps into the body of Tom Selleck in a *Magnum P.I.* epi-



Scott Bakula jumps into Lee Harvey Oswald's body in *Quantum Leap*.

sode! Selleck will make a brief cameo appearance. Another storyline will develop over three episodes, all using the same cast and director. In a nod to *JFK*, Sam will leap into the body of Lee Harvey Oswald in 1963. And yet another episode will feature only two actors in an homage to *Swept Away*. Budget restraints mean less period will be used on the show, and optical effects (largely for hologram Dean Stockwell) will be kept to a minimum.

ABC

Though it didn't fare well in the ratings, *The Young Indiana Jones Chronicles* has been picked up for next season. ABC has ordered a new two-hour film, plus 13 more one-hour episodes. Ten episodes of this year's run remain unshown and may serve as mid-season material at a new 8 P.M. time slot.

Viacom is readying six scripts on order from ABC for *Deadly Games*, a sci-fi series in which video game monsters escape their electronic confines and interface with the real world. Sounds stupid to me.

More news on George R.R. Martin's possible new sci-fi series *Doors*. Co-written by Jim Crocker and produced by Columbia, the series wil tell about the adventures of a woman who can go to a parallel universe. Earth Two, anyone?

Just to show they aren't copying NBC's awful *Mann & Machine*, ABC's upcoming show about a female cyborg who just happens to be a federal agent doesn't have a pun in the title. She's just *Running Delilah*.

Dinosaurs has been renewed for another season.

It's now the beginning of May, and *The Human Target* is still unscheduled, though ABC keeps talking about its imminent debut. Though the show may be a summer replacement, it probably won't make ABC's Fall schedule.

Fox

In addition to the syndicated *Kung Fu: The Legend Continues* and *Time Trax* carried on most Fox stations this fall, Fox is going to try *Knights of the Realm*, a medieval sitcom.

X-Men premieres the first of its 13 episodes on Saturday, September 5th at 10:00 A.M.

Syndication & Cable

USA Network is planning an entire block of programing with "Sci-Friday." *Swamp Thing* and *The Hitchhiker* are the only two shows announced so far. However, USA wil have no dearth of material. Now that they own the long-awaited Sci-Fi Channel, they can cross-promote Shows. MCA and Paramount are involved with both USA and Sci-Fi, and some new projects might emerge from this. Sci-Fi will air at least two original films per year.

Paragon international has dropped all plans for a syndicated *Power Pack* television series. Sorry.

DIC is producing 13 half-hours of the animated *Sgt. Kabukiman, NYPD*, based on the Troma film about a New York cop who transforms into a super-powered Kabuki actor to fight crime.

Swamp Thing continues its irregular schedule of new episodes on the USA Network. July will see several new episodes, including "Fear Itself" (July 3), "Dead and Married" (guest-starring *Miami Vice*'s Phillip Michael Thomas, July 10), "The Powers of Darkness" (with Jeremy Licht, July 17), "Special Request" (July 24), and "What Goes Around Comes Around" with *Magnum P.I.*'s Larry Manetti (July 31).

SuperForce has not been picked up for a third season as of this writing, and Viacom isn't hinting at its fate. It will probably get picked up for at least two more years so that it can be "stripped" (syndicated)."

Feature Films

Believe it or not, Hollywood's whispering about the possible new star of the live action *G.I. Joe*, now on Warner's slate of product. Sylvester Stallone is said to be interested. I guess he's trying to escape that typecasting thing.

Meanwhile, Arnold Schwarzenegger is *The Last Action Hero*, Columbia's newest movie written by Shane Black. Robert Zemeckis looks likely to direct this one.

Speaking of *Spider-Man*, its fate is still up in the air, although Cameron is most likely to use that film to finish off his Carolco contract . . . if the company lasts that long. Menachem Golan, who owns the movie rights, recently insisted that the film would be made, with a projected $40 million budget. Carolco's Alan Hirschfield says that both *Spider-Man* and *Terminator III* are in development for 1993, as long as the money doesn't run out. Carolco's actively seeking financing for the '92-93 period.

Meanwhile, Cameron has jumped ship to sign a five-year deal with 20th Century Fox to produce 12 films and direct four of them. Cameron walked away from the agreement with approximately $500 million guaranteed for his use over the contract period! He'll also have total creative control over the films, an almost unheard of deal in Hollywood. Whether Cameron will bring the *X-Men* feature over from Carolco (he's been planning to produce) has not been decided upon yet.

On the Silver Pictures Front, here's an update: *Green Lantern*, *Judge Dredd*, and *Rogue Trooper* have been completely dropped. *The American* is waiting for a new script. *V for Vendetta* is in a "holding pattern," *Sgt. Rock* has been rewritten by Ebbe Roe Smith and has once again gained Arnold Schwarzenegger's interest, and *Richie Rich*, written by Neil Tolkin, is in negotiation with Macauley Culkin.

Moebius' animated *Starwatcher* has begun production. Ridley Scott directs.

Bill Cosby a super-hero? The Cosman has taken a cameo role in Robert Townsend's *Meteor Man* for MGM. The film is about homeless people who are given strange super-powers by a meteor shower!

Cos isn't the only TV comedy guy making the switch to super-heroing. I've now received confirmation that Damon Wayans is directing and starring with Keenan Ivory Wayans in a super-hero film parody *Blankman*, filming later this year. Perhaps they'll co-star brother Marlon Wayans as the little sidekick that couldn't in a nod to his losing the role of Robin in *Batman Returns*.

Some premiere dates to mark on your calendar: Ralph Bakshi's live action/animated *Cool World* July 10; Dolph Lundgren's *Universal Soldier* July 10 or 17; Sam Raimi's *Army of Darkness: Evil Dead III* (with accompanying Dark Horse comic series), Rutger Hauer in *Buffy, the Vampire Slayer*, and Francis Ford Coppola's *Bram Stoker's Dracula* on August 14; and *Hellraiser III: Hell on Earth* in late August.

On *One on One with John Tesh*, Christopher Reeve talked about returning to the *Superman* role, saying, "The real truth of the matter from my point of view is the only reason to make *Superman V* is if you could absolutely knock people out. Until and unless somebody would spend the money and the time and the talent to assemble the ingredients for that knockout movie, I really wouldn't want to do it, because the last one was such a disappointment." Nevertheless, some papers have reported his agreement to return to the role in *Superman: The New Movie*. Ilya Salkind is producing the $35 million film, scripted by comics veteran Cary Bates, and featuring Brainiac.

Instead of *She-Hulk*, Brigette Nielsen is doing *OO Kid* with Corey Haim and John Rhyes David; it appears to be some kind of James Bond spoof. Joy.

Speaking of busty women, work is apparently proceeding on The Film Company's two Americomics tie-in films, *Dawn Hunter* and FemForce, the Movie.

The Film company is also accepting audition photos from all over the country for *FemForce*. Americomics owner Bill Black is co-producing and writing the film with Mike Frankovich, Jr. Lois Hamilton is also co-producing. According to a letter Frankovich sent me in early May, actress Sharon Blair may have been cast as Synn. *FemForce* is planned for filming in Russia and Yugoslavia!

RoboCop 3 has been rated PG-13, but there's no word when the long-completed film will be released by the nearly bankrupt Orion Pictures.

Dark Horse's film deal with Largo Entertainment has two projects on the slate: *Concrete*, written by Larry Wilson, Caroline Thompson, and Paul Chadwick, to be directed by Wilson; and *Time Cop*, to be produced by *Evil Dead*'s Sam Raimi and Dark Horse publisher Mike Richardson.

Above: (co-producer) Lois Hamilton as Dawn Hunter. Below: Sharon Blair as Synn.

Caroline Thompson is also working again with Tim Burton, whose next project after *Batman Returns* will be the musical *Sweeney Todd*. Larry Wilson, who has co-written Michael Jackson's *MidKnight* and *Mai, the Psychic Girl* (for Burton to direct) with Thompson, is solo scripting Warner & Amblin's *Plastic Man* film (for Christmas '93 release!)

Robin Williams will be the voice of Disney's *Aladdin*, due this fall. Among William's other possible roles is the lead in a live action *Dudley DoRight* film.

Theme Parks

All the Six Flags Theme Parks will have *Batman Returns* tie-ins, with the Gurnee, Illinois Park showcasing *Batman: The Ride*. The Arlington, Texas and California parks will be opening *The Batman Stunt Show* as well.

Video Releases

This is along shot, but check your video stores for *Death to the PeeWee Squad* from Troma Pictures. This low-budgeter was produced, written, and

Design from *Batman: The Animated Series.*

directed by none other than comic legend Neal Adams! Not only that, but the two main kids in the film are played by his own brood, Zeea and Jason Adams. From the small movie poster I have a reproduction of, it also appears to feature Gray Morrow and Denys Cowan. Made in 1987, it features the memorable tag line, "They were too young to vote, but old enough to save the world!" True trash from the comic world!

The *Flash* pilot film and the two-hour *Trickster* combo will be released by Warner Home video later this summer, and the Nightshade two-parter may show up as well. No release dates have been set.

The long delayed *Captain America* video will be released July 22nd from RCA/Columbia at the rental-only price of $89.95.

Best Film and video will release their next set of *Marvel Super-Heroes* on or prior to August 1.

Disney will release their tremendous blockbuster *Beauty and the Beast* on October 30th at the sell-through price of $24.99!

If you're very good this Christmas, Warner plans to bring you the *Batman Returns* video. No firm price or date will be set until the movie is declared a hit or a flop.

Batman Returns

Angry at the amount of press I've been giving *Batman Returns* (here and in other magazines) Warner Brothers has *frozen me out* of publicity on the film. Warner has tried to keep a tremendously tight lid on the project, even going so far as to hire detectives to find out who sold *The Star* some unauthorized photos last year. Though some Warner sources have been as helpful as they were allowed to be (hi, Jeff), others have been tremendously brusque and rude, failing to return phone calls and lying about film facts.

In February, as the film was wrapping, journalists from many magazines were given set tours and visits, and some were granted interviews. Although I was in Los Angeles *that same week*, and was on the Warner Brothers lot for other business during the *same days* they were giving the set visits, Warner representatives refused to return my calls or allow me a tour. As you read last issue, they did give a DC writer a tour for an *Amazing Heroes* story, but they they gave explicit instructions that I was not to be given any cooperation. In addition, Warner has refused to send any photos for my use in my columns, even as we are a month away from the film's opening and many magazines have already run pictures. Whether Warner's heavy-handed treatment of me will continue is yet to be seen, but I hope you'll join them in giving me one loud raspberry.

Other mainstream magazines have reacted negatively to Warner's efforts to keep *Batman Returns* pictures from them, complaining to *Variety* editors that set publicist Michael Singer was hoarding all the good photos for his book, *The Making of Batman Returns*. Warner says that the charges are nonsense, but has only been trickling photos out over the last few weeks. Meanwhile, the *Starlog* group of magazines has had no problem whatsoever being granted interviews, set visits, and reams of photos.

An insider on the set of *Batman Returns* told *Variety* that the rushes of the film show that "this is much more of a Tim Burton film than the first one; it'll perform under expectation." Indeed, top industry insiders are expecting the film to fall behind *Lethal Weapon 3* in the summer months.

Batman Returns merchandising will be hitting you hard and heavy this summer. Kenner's toy line is already going, though Catwoman's figure is not seen on the packaging (and the Penguin is a cheaply repainted *Super-Powers* figure who looks nothing like Danny Devito). Ralston-Purina has a new *Batman Returns* cereal made of rice and cereal. Chorus Line is releasing a whole line of clothing based on Catwoman's garb, to be sold in Macy's and other major stores. Sears has a major display of items, and MacDonald's has major giveaways starting June 12, backed by coupons given away by J.C. Penney. And look for Batman to be drinking "The Right On, Baby," as Coca Cola begins its *Batman Returns* promotions on June 5th. Choices Hotels will feature *BR* commercials, and will sponsor charity-based parties the night before it opens, as well as sponsoring the one-hour *Making of Batman Returns* special.

Batman vs. Two-Face on top of a cool giant prop.

Meanwhile, executive producers Ben Melnicker and Michael Uslan have filed a huge lawsuit against Warner, Peter Gubers, Jon Peters, and Polygram over revenue from the first *Batman*. Despite *Batman*'s to-date gross of over $251 million in the U.S. alone, over $600 million worldwide, and almost $2 billion in licensing, Warner Brothers has only paid them $400,000 total. Melniker and Uslan (whose Batfilm produces *Swamp Thing*, among others) originally signed to get 40% of what Gubers-Peters got, but later had to sign another contract (under duress, they claim) giving them only $400,000 up front and net profit points. According to Warner, the film hasn't made a profit. The Batfilm guys are suing for $8 million plus contingent compensation.

After losing out on the role of the Catwoman, Sean Young is now supposed to play the clasic '40s good girl heroine *Black Cat*, produced by Melniker and Uslan. The super-heroine, whose comic book costume is remarkably similar to the suit Young wore when campaigning for the Catwoman part, may be headed onto the screen soon, with Batfilm promising news to break in about a month.

Batman: The Animated Series

Batman: The Animated Series is a hit before it's even reached the air. Advertising for the show has already been locked up, at a record-breaking $50,000 per 30-second ad! Toy lines and product tie-ins are already being designed and created.

Batman: The Animated Series premieres Monday, September 7th at 4:30 P.M., and shows every weekday thereafter. Warner Brothers is producing 65 all-new episodes in a very dark, film noir/art deco style reminiscent of the Fleischer Brothers' *Superman* cartoons of the early '40s. The series also takes its cues from Tim Burton's *Batman* films, right down to the slightly altered opening theme music by Danny Elfman.

A sample episode sets the tone for the series. "On Leather Wings" finds Detective Bullock hunting down Batman, thinking him a murderer. In reality, the bat-like killer loose in Gotham's streets is scientist Karl Langstrom, transformed into the Man-Bat. Batman must stop his counterpart from his crazed chemical robberies before anyone else gets hurt, including Man-Bat himself!

Other episodes will find Batman trapped in Stonegate Prison at the mercy of Mr. Big, facing down the Joker in an abandoned carnival with the life of the Mayor's son at stake, and stopping the ventriloquist and Scarface from bringing illegal gambling to Gotham. In other episodes, Ra's Al Ghul and Talia kidnap Robin, Harvey Dent is transformed into the twisted Two-Face, Killer Croc is born in Gotham City's sewer system, and Catwoman and Batman are trapped on an island where they become prizes of the deadliest game they'll ever see.

Batman/Bruce Wayne (vocalized by Kevin Conroy) is the obsessed, dark and violent hero we know from the comics, though he won't kill criminals as he's done in both films. Bruce Wayne is the socially awkward millionaire philanthropist who heads up Wayne Industries and the charitable Wayne Foundation. Batman has many familiar bat-gadgets in his immense Batcave: a talking batcomputer, a gym, a trophy room, and a garage with the sleek Batmobile, the Batcycle, the Batboat, the Batcopter, the Batwing, and the Batglider. Whew!

Batman will be aided in his war on crime by his ever-present droll butler Alfred (vocalized by Clive Revill), who will provide light comedy relief, Robin/Dick Grayson (Loren Lester) who's usually away at college, but will be in every fourth or fifth episode, and Batgirl/Barbara Gordon, a high school student librarian who idolizes Batman, will guest-star in only a few episodes. One planned episode includes a guest appearance by the beautiful "famed illusionist, Zatanna."

Another Art Deco-influenced set design.

destine meetings with the Caped Crusader. Grubby Detective Harvey Bullock considers Batman a menace, while hispanic single mother Officer Renee Montoyo (Ingrid Oilu) is undecided.

Other regulars on the show include Mayor Hamilton Hill (Lloyd Bochner), a weak politician; tabloid talk-show host Summer Gleason (Mari Devon); and Alfred's world-travelling sweetheart Maggie Paige.

Villains of the show the tragically scarred Harvey Dent/Two-Face (*Night Court*'s Richard Moll); the Joker (Tim Curry), who will appear every 5-10 episodes; the Robin Hood-like Catwoman/Selina Kyle (Adrienne Barbeau); and the hideous mutant, the Penguin. Look for appearances by the Riddler, Scarecrow, Poison Ivy, Mr. Freeze, the Ventriloquist & Scarface, Dr. Hugo Strange, Clayface, the Mad Hatter, Killer Croc, The Calendar Man, and the Gentleman Ghost!

Batman: The Animated Series will be Darker in tone than most cartoon series. The two-minute pilot actually shows thugs shooting real bullets at Batman, and punches and other forms of violence are shown. Those TV watchdog groups will have a hard time cornering this one though, as Fox is firmly behind the series. Indeed, they're considering premiering the series in prime time to let adult viewers know about it.

From what I've seen, *Batman* looks like a must-see series. The show looks lush and gorgeous, with scripts by many past and present Batman comics writers like Marv Wolfman. Fox might have even a bigger winner than *Batman Returns*!

The Gotham City Police aren't able to publicly support Batman or his methods, but Commissioner Gordon (Bob Hastings) occasionally has clan-

BACKSTAGE HAS NO FUTURE

Although this is the final *Backstage* column, for those readers who want the same news, interviews, reviews and information, I'll direct your attention over to *Wizard* magazine, where a column called "Hollywood Heroes" will be appearing as of issue #12 next month.

I'm still asking all of my loyal readers who also read my *Marvel Age* column to be sure and help save it. A poll ran in #112 and #113, and unless readers demand otherwise, my "Reel Marvel" column will be axed. Write the Marvel Age Reader's Poll and tell them you don't want me dropped! Vote today! Vote often!

Keep an eye out in the stores for *Celluloid Super-Heroes*, a new series I'll be doing with Image Publishing. In each volume of the series, I'll examine several super-hero movies and shows, giving complete episode guides, interviews, and behind-the-scenes looks. The first volume should be available in September. For more information, contact Image at 2038 Hempstead Turnpike Suite 150, East Meadow, NY, 11554. Please note that this is *not* the comic book publisher Image.

I'll be around the comic book business as well. Several issues of *A Nightmare on Elm Street: The Beginning* are still due, as is a one-shot *Quantum Leap* (#9) and a four-part *Dark Shadows*, all from Innovation. A tremendous *Peter Pan & Wendy* series is on tap from Tundra late in 1993. Watch for my name in the credits of some DC and Marvel anthologies, and a fill-in here and there. I also still edit the *Gay Comics* series.

I'm still looking for video copy of CBS's pilot film *The Dark Avenger*, which aired last year. If anyone still has it or episodes of the *Thing* cartoon show, please write.

Well, the curtains are closing and the lights are dimming. With the janitor sweeping away six years of *Amazing Heroes* memories, I'll savor the final bittersweet moment of the time I've spent . . . *Backstage*.

Fans may write me at 2167 SW Yamhill #6, Portland, OR 97205. Anniversary cards accepted! ●

"This is Andy Mangels, signing off."

JEFF LANG: *So, why funny animals?*

MARTIN WAGNER: Well, that's a good place to start, a good choice. I'm going to have to steal this from Chuck Jones. His reasoning is that it's much easier to humanize animals than it is to humanize humans. That's a direct quote from his autobiography, *Chuck Amuck*.

My original reason for using funny animals was that when I was a student at the University of Houston, I did a daily strip that used a cougar character, which is the school's mascot. I did that strip for a full year and decided I liked those characters—they're good character designs. I kept them up for *Hepcats*, but for *Hepcats* I didn't want to do something that was so campus-y and topical. I wanted to do something where there were characters in situations and try some new animal designs. It just sorta spread out from that. I haven't got any other real reason for it. That's just how it fell together. I find it interesting how it's been received by fandom.

LANG: *How so? What do you mean?*

WAGNER: When the *Hepcats* comic book series debuted in the summer of '89, the book got a good response. It sold well. This was back when the black & white independents were selling poorly, but the bottom hadn't really collapsed. The first issue print run was 6000. These days, a new black & white comic from an unknown small publisher would be lucky to do 1000 copies, maybe 1200.

I discovered almost immediately that there is this highly organized contingent of funny animal fans out there—it's an established genre. The first issue had only been out for a month and a half when I trucked on out to the San Diego Con—very ambitious of me—and I found myself welcomed warmly by all these funny animal fans. I was invited to all these parties and got the red carpet treatment, and it was really quite nice. It's interesting, though, that there was a bit of a backlash to my unconventional approach.

LANG: *What do you mean by "unconventional?"*

WAGNER: Well, for one thing, with my characters you can't quite tell what everyone is. Joey and Gunther are obviously a cat and a rhinoceros, respectively, but the big debate is what Arnie is, and nobody seems to know what Erica is. The thing about it is, and what I told the furry fans—the thing that they might have had trouble relating to initially—is that *Hepcats* is what it is. What makes *Hepcats* different from any other funny animals book is that the anthropomorphism has nothing whatsoever to do with what's going on in the book.

LANG: *Then is there some inherent value in doing it?*

WAGNER: I've had to think about this. If you'd asked me in the summer of '89, I probably would have said, "Du-uh, du-uh." Now I can legitimately say that I believe, in the slice-of-life stories that I've been doing, that the anthropomorphism helps people bond with the characters.

For example, in the first issue, a lot of people commented on the daydream sequence and said, "this is exactly like me in class. You got it down to a tee. A lot of people bonded with Joey, but if he had been a human character, a white, gangly guy with thick Coke bottle glasses, well, then he would have been a stereotype. That scene might have only spoken to guys like that. If you bring a human in, people get their preconceived notions all revved up. If you bring in these animals, all these scenes can be personal no matter who you are. In other words, if you put an animal head on a character, a reader can mentally pop that head off and pop on whoever's head they choose.

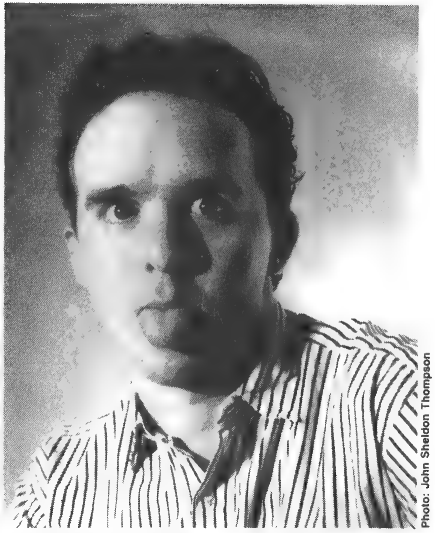


Photo: John Sheldon Thompson

A FEW WORDS with MARTIN WAGNER

Interview by Jeff Lang

HUH! YEAH, I'LL BET!
NOW I SEE THE TRUTH! YOU JUDASES! YOU FRANKEN-STEIN MONSTERS!
HERE I'VE BEEN, BUSTING MY BUTT, BARELY MAKING MY RENT, JUST TO KEEP MY ARTISTIC INTEGRITY INTACT, AND YOU YOYOS ARE LIVING IT UP IN THIS...

Martin Wagner, starving artist, complains to his high-living creations, Joey & Gunther.

LANG: *Beginning in issue #3, you made a very ballsy move and started an 18-chapter story.*
WAGNER: [*incredulous*] Everyone tells me that's ballsy.
LANG: *Well, if it was Dave Sim, I'd say "Damn the torpedoes," but, considering the condition of the independents market, I'd be a little worried about making it to issue #21.*
WAGNER: Well, my approach towards the self-publishing thing is, "Damn the torpedoes." If every comic book shop dropped the fucking book tomorrow, I'd still publish it. I'd advertise in *The Comics Journal* and the *Comics Buyer's Guide* and do subscription only. If the direct market doesn't want 'em, fuck 'em. If they do, beautiful. Part of the reason for starting an 18-issue story in the third issue was to publicly say, "This book is here to stay." I can tell you right now that I have story material for 100 issues, and I'll hit 100, direct market or no. After 100, I don't know—I don't work that far ahead.

If I had been a more pennywise businessman than I have been, the business end of me would have said, "Uh-uh." But the artist in me says, "I have something I want to say."

What Dave Sim and I hope to communicate to retailers at the Capital City Show is that if they support dedicated self-publishers, then the self-publisher will keep going. It seems that a lot of independent publishers are trying to come up with their answer to the [Teenage Mutant Ninja] Turtles and generate some "Turtle Dollars." A lot of retailers and distributors are looking for the next Turtles, but something like the Turtles happens once in a lifetime.
LANG: *Are you suggesting that retailers and distributors are going to have to rethink their policies towards the independents?*
WAGNER: There's an enormous, untapped market out there that they aren't bothering with. The one thing (about the direct market that has surprised me is how insular it is. It's a little universe where Marvel says "Jump," and everyone says, "How high?" What's being ignored, it seems to me, is what the real world wants. The fact that Doubleday Books can sell 200,000 copies of *The Cartoon History of the Universe*, and yet the regular comic book edition from Last Gasp sells only 4000 copies in the direct market shows how out of touch the direct market is with the general readership. The could explode the roofs off their stores if they tried to interest an adult audience in some alternative stuff.

A page from *Hepcats*.

The comic industry seems to think that Marvel is a 10,000-year empire that will continue to fill their coffers, and it's not true. The recent artist defections are a sign of the cracks in the Marvel monolith.
LANG: *Let's talk about* Hepcats *a little more. Do you consider yourself a writer who happens to draw or an artist who happens to write?*
WAGNER: The latter. I've been drawing since I was a child, so I'm an artist who has learned to write. When I was a teenager, I was heavily into science fiction fandom, and I tried my hand at a lot of science fiction short stories, and I was really, really bad at it. I think a lot of that was my discomfort at having to make a lot of stuff up, and, at the same time having to know a lot of complex stuff. I *can* do slice-of-life stuff and write believable, realistic stories because I can take things I've experienced and put them down. So I think of myself as an artist first, but I also think of the writing as very important. It's the part of *Hepcats* that I really put an effort into. The art is a delight—staring at a white sheet of Bristol is like sex to me because it's like, boy, what am I going to do *now*? It's an infinite realm of possibility.
LANG: *Do you do a tight script?*
WAGNER: I'm getting tighter with my writing. I used to just sit down and be spontaneous with it. Now that the graphic novel is progressing, I am getting much tighter with it. The second half of issue #9 is a discussion between Kevin and Erica where we finally find out what all this sneaking around is all about, and I've written 14 drafts already. Not many large details are changing—it's just a matter of getting the line of dialogue just right.
LANG: *Let's talk about the small press book you were going to put out*—How to do a Small Press Comic Book.
WAGNER: Actually, the title was *How (Not) to Publish Your Own Comic Book*. It's not going to be published because it didn't get enough advance orders. It would have been a very expensive book to produce what with photographs and diagrams and lots of hours on the long distance telephone interviewing people. The advance orders came in and they were lame, lame, lame. They were probably better than most small press books, but still under 3000, and it *baffled* me.

This is something about comic shop retailers that flabbergasts me. You will just sit there and listen to them talk your ear off until you want to just punch them or shoot them dead so they'll shut up, about "Such-and-such black & white book that I got burned on," or "I got burned by the glut," and "The fucking small press black & white book because they're all bad and amateurish." But they're not willing to order and support a book that would dissuade those rank amateurs from putting out those bad books.

My main point with the book was if you're not doing pro-level work, don't do it yet. If you can't look at what you've written & drawn and say, "This stands up to what's on the comic shop stands," you're not ready to self-publish. Self-publishing is not en excuse not to be professional. It's not a way to bypass becoming professional and doing quality work, just so you can say you've got a comic book on the stands.

I did a direct mail-out, explaining that this was the approach to the book, and it got enormously enthusiastic write-ups in the Diamond and Capital catalogues, and the orders came in and they were pathetic. And I thought, "Well, fuck you people." If you're not willing to support a book that's designed to save you money, then I see no reason to provide you with one. So, what I will be doing is taking it chapter-by-chapter and serializing it in the back of *Hepcats*. It'll be shorter, more condensed, but the information will get out there.
LANG: *Tell me a little bit about what you're doing with Reed Waller.*
WAGNER: Well, I'm not really doing anything *with* Reed Waller.
LANG: *All right,* for *Reed Waller.*
WAGNER: I heard about Reed and it broke my heart. [*Reed Waller is undergoing treatment for cancer of the colon—TH*] These folks are good friends and they're kindred souls and I felt that I should so something. I did a couple of pages for the benefit book [*Images of Omaha #1* and 2, available from Kitchen Sink Press], but I wanted to do something more.
LANG: *Well, what did you do?*
WAGNER: I've done a 10-color silkscreen print with Gunther in a tuxedo dancing with Omaha, who's in a flowing gown.
LANG: *It's from a scene in an Astaire-Rogers musical.*
WAGNER: Yeah, *Swing Time*. Basically, it's a freeze frame from the film with some modifications. Sorry it's taken so long to get the thing out, but it's just ready to go. By the time this sees print, people should have them on the wall.
LANG: *To close, let's talk a little about what you're going to be doing over the next four or five issues.*
WAGNER: Well, I'm now a third of the way through "Snowblind," and I've gone back and reread the first third. I'm looking at things and thinking about better approaches for the second two-thirds. I want to bring back humor into the book, like the scenes in #8 where they're searching the apartment, because *Hepcats* may have gotten a little too sour there for a couple of issues. What's going to happen for the rest of "Snowblind" is, we're going to find out what happened to Erica, what she did about it, and how it has affected her. I don't really think that anyone has figured it out yet. It's amazing how unimaginative some people can be. A lot of people have contacted me with their predictions, and it's been, like, "Come on, if I'm going to be *this* obvious about it, I might as well hang up my pen right now."

It's going to be fun and I think that anyone who hunts down *Hepcats* in their local comic book store will not be disappointed. ●

From *Hepcats* #8: Arnie and Erica.

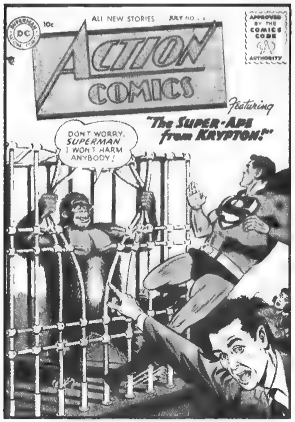
Don Rosa's Incredibly Intelligent DC Gorillas COVER GALLERY

In this latest installment of this perpetually ongoing series, we'll look at the covers of DC super-hero comics featuring incredibly intelligent gorillas (I.I.G.).

How could I do less than lead off with a Gorilla Grodd cover from *Flash* #127—he's our still extant remnant of the DC I.I.G. era! Next, on the covers of *Action* #218 & 238, we see that even Krypton had problems with I.I.G.s. On *Batman* #114 we see how the Dark Knight was aided by an I.I.G.; that is, until it spotted the giant banana on the roof of the Acme Banana Factory. Who else but a MOD I.I.G. would hang out on the cover of *Strange Adventures* #201 under those groovy Go-Go Checks?! On *Jimmy Olsen* #24 we see an I.I.G. and an incredibly goofy Jimmy (pardon the redundancy). *Congo Bill* #6 has a whole city of I.I.G., and *Tomahawk* #107 features an I.I.G. to give Tomahawk a breather from all those invisible indians and fire indians and flying indians and giant indians and so forth.

NEXT ISSUE: More! More! More!

[Maybe it's just as well the magazine's been cancelled—TH]



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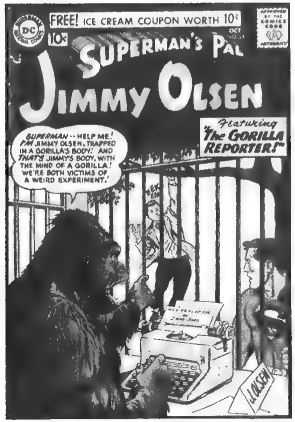
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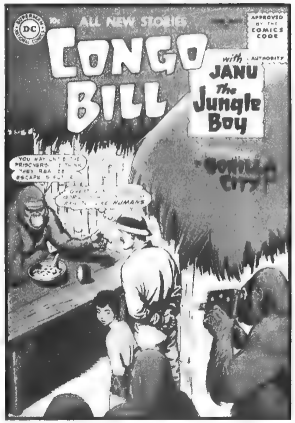

THE BIGGEST BOOBY TRAP OF THE WAR—DOUBLE CROSS of the GORILLA RANGER!
TOMAHAWK
INTRODUCING THUNDER MAN, SPECIAL CHEST VILLAIN!

AMAZING HEROES

1981-1992

ABBREVIATIONS

This index covers issues #1-203/4. All of the *Amazing Heroes* issues that Fantagraphics has in stock can be purchased through our back issue ad.

The categories are fairly self-explanatory; It should be noted that "Characters, etc." includes Groups and Anthology titles. Reviews and Humorous features have not been included.

C = Checklist
DB = Doc's Bookshelf
H = history
HC = history & checklist
IC = Information Center
IG = Infernal Gall
SP = Small Press
P = Perspective
VV = Video Views
CC = Cartoon Corner

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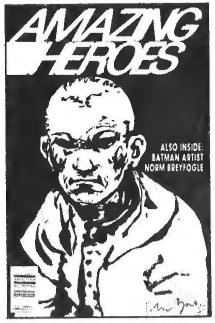

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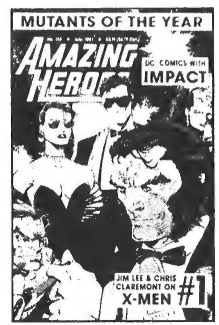

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STROM'S INDEX

by Dave Strom

Number of Strom's Indexes in *Amazing Heroes*: 50

Issue number of the *Amazing Heroes* in which Arlene C.H. Fassett said "Number of issues 'Strom's Index' should continue to run: all of them": 184

Location of where I wrote the first Strom's Index: Printer's Inc. in Mountain View, over a cup of Cafe Mocha.

Steps taken to write subsequent columns:
1. Stand in a comic book shop Friday night, holding a clipboard.
2. Thumb through all the new comics.
3. Write phony statistics along with some real ones.
4. Much later, type the statistics into my computer.
5. Mail in a 9"x12" envelope.

Location of a rewrite of this column in particular: Printer's Inc, over another Cafe Mocha (a double) and mocha cake. Maximum mocha.

Rank of "potential discounts on comics," "no more questions about why I'm writing on the clipboard," and "I had to thumb through a lot of comics to get ideas" as to the main reasons I told comic book managers who I was if I shopped there regularly: 1,2,3

Number of times I wished I used a pocket computer to hack out the stats rather than writing them on the clipboard, since by the time I typed then into my home computer, I had trouble reading my own handwriting: 200

Main irritation of this column: reading comics off the rack and scribbling on a clipboard every Friday before I eat dinner

Main pleasure of this column: writing stats like the next three

Number of times Ed Anger—self-described "pig-biting mad" columnist of the Weekly World News—said that Northstar being gay will turn American boys into homosexuals: 2

And introduce them to AIDS: 1

Chances of Ed Anger being a redneck turning American boys into dangerously inbred bigots: 99 in 100

[DAMN, that felt GOOD!]

Items I wrote that were edited out (this happened very rarely), and the reason why:

the title "SEXIST STATISTIC OF THE MONTH"

[Tom thought the title wasn't supposed to be printed. This was a logical mistake. This item was just before the statistic, "Chances of Teri Wood being as cute in real life as Silver in "The Cartoonist": 1 in 2." Does anyone ever ask if male artists are as handsome as the super-heroes they draw?]

A reference to Mike Royko's book *Boss* (if you want to know why American cities hurt so much, read this book): lack of space. (I think. I didn't ask.)

Most unusual editing in the index:

In an early index, I wrote "sh-t" and "g-d damn." The editor changed them to "shit" and "god damn." In a much later index, I wrote "fart." The editor changed to to "f--t."

Number of writers fired from *The Comics Journal* for plagiarizing Pauline Kael (New York film critic): 1

Number of times I have been fired for copying the style of Harper's Index (to which this column has always been a homage): 0

Number of stats that Tom Harrington sent me (in my little SASE that I always anal-retentively included with my indexes) that I used: 8 approx

[I often wished I had thought of them first.]

Topics that I would have liked to have written an entire index about, but didn't and the reason why:

Religion: Would have tried to write one if *Amazing Heroes* had lasted

Magazines about comic books: Ditto

The Gulf War: Couldn't think of enough stats

The book *Unreliable Sources: a Guide to Detecting Bias in the News Media*: Ditto

Topics I would liked to have mentioned, but didn't:

The Peter David-John Byrne feud: It was in another magazine, so readers here probably wouldn't know about it, and John Byrne's writing already gave me plenty of material to use.

Gary Groth's sesquipedalian (look it up) bad-boy trashing of the sympathy letters in the *Comic Buyers Guide* for the late Carol Kalish: I caught wind of it too late, and it doesn't fit the subject of this index.

The Harlan Ellison—Gary Groth Feud: I did write some items pounding on Gary. However, the more I looked at them, the more I realized that I—a Harlan fan—was reacting like a dogmatic fanboy. Well, I'd like to think that was the real reason, and not BUCK, BUCK, BUCKAWWW!

Reason I stopped discussing upcoming stats in the index with other people:

I showed a professional I respect some stats about the Ellison—Groth feud, and he said he told friends about them, and then I never used them.

Ratio of the chance of Wood-Strom feud being real and Professional Wrestling being real: 1:1

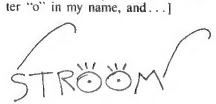
"DAVE, what are you doing? Can't you keep in character for just one more column?"

[Oh, all right, Teri.]

Chances of the readers reading me first because I have such talent: 99 in 100

"Chances of Teri being talented enough to write AND draw in her feature: 99 in 100"

[Well, betcha I could draw if I put my mind to it. Bet I can do that little talking-name thing you do in "The Cartoonist." Just gimmie another letter "o" in my name, and . . .]



SOUND EFFECTS: Teri Laughing herself silly.

[Oh shut up, Teri!]

Chances of me trying to sell this column elsewhere: 1 in 2

To Teri Wood, Kevin Dooley, Chris McCubbin, Tom Harrington, Cynthia Fluharty (for all those letters), and to everyone else who enjoyed the Index and *Amazing Heroes*, Teri said it best:

It's been fun!

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